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Palmtop

The journal for Psion Series 3 and 3a users

Issue 8 Bimonthly

They're here!

Series 3c
1Mb and 2Mb

Siena
512K and 1Mb

FULL IN-DEPTH REVIEWS INSIDE!

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(Volume 2, issue 2)

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Palmtop

The journal for Psion Series 3 and 3a users

Palmtop is...

Steve Clack - Editor

Pete Sipple - Associate Editor

Thanks...

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General

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Editorial

Having spotted the new machines on the front cover and jumping straight from there to the 17 page article starting on page 6, I'm sure that 98 percent of you have already digested the whole thing before even glancing at this editorial.

So, they're neat—aren't they? Of course the 3c is only an interim machine and there's still no sign of the fabled Series 4, but this is still the hottest news since the 1Mb and 2Mb 3a's, and I'm sure it will remain so until the Series 4 *does* arrive, hopefully sometime next year.

Strategically speaking though, I'll bet that the 3c isn't the cause of all the hubbub at Psion headquarters in London at the moment. The little 'cut down' *Siena* is surely of much more significance, as their first foray into the mid-end of the 'Personal Digital Assistant' market since the Series 3 concept began. The 3's have always been pretty much the cutting edge of palmtop sophistication, and Psion's decision to drop a couple of models in behind the enemy lines of Sharp, Casio, HP and US Robotics was a bold step.

At around £170 and £230 both *Siena* models are certainly in the top bracket of the less serious 'organiser' market, (or the bottom notch of the high-end, depending upon your perspective) and their decision to squeeze in almost the entire built-in software of the 3a—and then some—puts the Siena into the position of being at the same time both physically tiny and very powerful.

I don't believe that the positioning of the *Siena* will have any startling effect on the way people buy palmtops—it's just another couple of additions to the range after all—but it will certainly strengthen Psion's market share by 'mopping up' the people who thought the 3a was just a *little* too much for them, and who don't feel a need for SSD expansion slots.

For the average person wanting a personal address book, notepad and other utilities the *Siena* will be all the power they ever need in a handheld device, and a stylish fashion accessory to boot. I do believe that it *is* starting to become fashionable to be seen with a palmtop computer these days, and with the help of machines like the *Siena* the era when palmtops are truly embraced may be almost with us.

Steve Clack - 25th August 1996

Palmtop News

The latest hot gossip on what's happening in the Psion world

Psion licenses the 3a Operating System

On July 15th Psion announced the formation of a new company, Psion Software PLC, charged with the task of licensing the Psion ROM-based operating systems and applications software. David Potter, Chairman of Psion PLC said "One of our strategies is to establish our platform as an open standard. We are already recognised as the world leader in the palmtop computer market and this sector will inevitably attract more players as communication and computing technologies continue to converge. Our licensing strategy will allow us to participate in emerging markets without defocusing our existing business."

Amstrad deal called off

The proposed deal between Psion PLC and consumer electronic company Amstrad is off. The deal, reported to be worth around £234 million, would have allowed Psion to incorporate cellular technology from Amstrad's mobile phone company *Dancall* into future machines. It seems that the two parties were unable to agree a price.

Internet connectivity

Expect the release of the Psion TCP/IP stack within the next few months. The stack software will allow communication software packages for the Series 3a/3c to make a connection to the Internet. Limited connection is already possible via CompuServe and CiX, but the arrival of a Psion TCP/IP stack will enable e-mail, news, and World Wide Web information to be downloaded from the majority of other Internet service providers around the world.

NEW WORLD

New World Technology WWW site

Psion users with Internet access may want to take a look at this new site, from US Psion retailers, New World Technology. As well as some clever use of web page technology, there's a Psion FAQ, a shareware top ten and a new mail order experience. To order goods, visitors stroll through an online shopping mall, adding items to a 'shopping basket'. Users can then pay for the selected items over the Internet using secure credit card payment. NWT also maintain an FTP site for downloading shareware.

- Web Page http://www.nwt.com
- FTP Site ftp.nwt.com/FTP/S3a/

Hold the Bridge

Purple Software's proposed Bridge game is further delayed due to technical setbacks, and release has been put back to an undefined date. We will be featuring the software in *Palmtop* as soon as it becomes available.

Notepad goes commercial

The popular 'Notepad' shareware package by Pelican Software is just about to be re-released as a commercial package by Purple Software in the UK and Pelican Software/Psion Inc. in the USA.

Agenda Synchronisers...

Psion's soon-to-be-released 'Agenda Synchroniser' software and Widget's new update to their 'Agenda Link' program were not available in time for inclusion in this issue, but will be covered in depth in the next issue of *Palmtop*.

Travel info for Psion users

Mobile Software's recent agreement with CNN International helps the frequent traveller to stay in touch. Free copies of CNN Pages (and the latest Expotel Pages) are available from their Web site.

Following an agreement with Harper Collins, Nicholson London Pages offers information on over 3,100 venues & services in London. It's available on diskette for £19.95 from Widget Software.

And the real news...

...is of course Psion's release of four new machines on 5th September. See over the page for a full 17 page review!

So—what's new, Psion?

Pete Sipple and Steve Clack get their hands on Psion's latest releases...

After many months of speculation, Psion have finally released the latest additions to their range of handheld machines. Like any good business, the marketing team at Psion PLC are notoriously secretive about the launch of any new products, however, *Palmtop* was recently invited to visit Psion's premises to take a sneak preview and to gain some hands-on experience with the new machines prior to their official release.

There are four new computers and some new peripherals, all due for launch on September 5th.

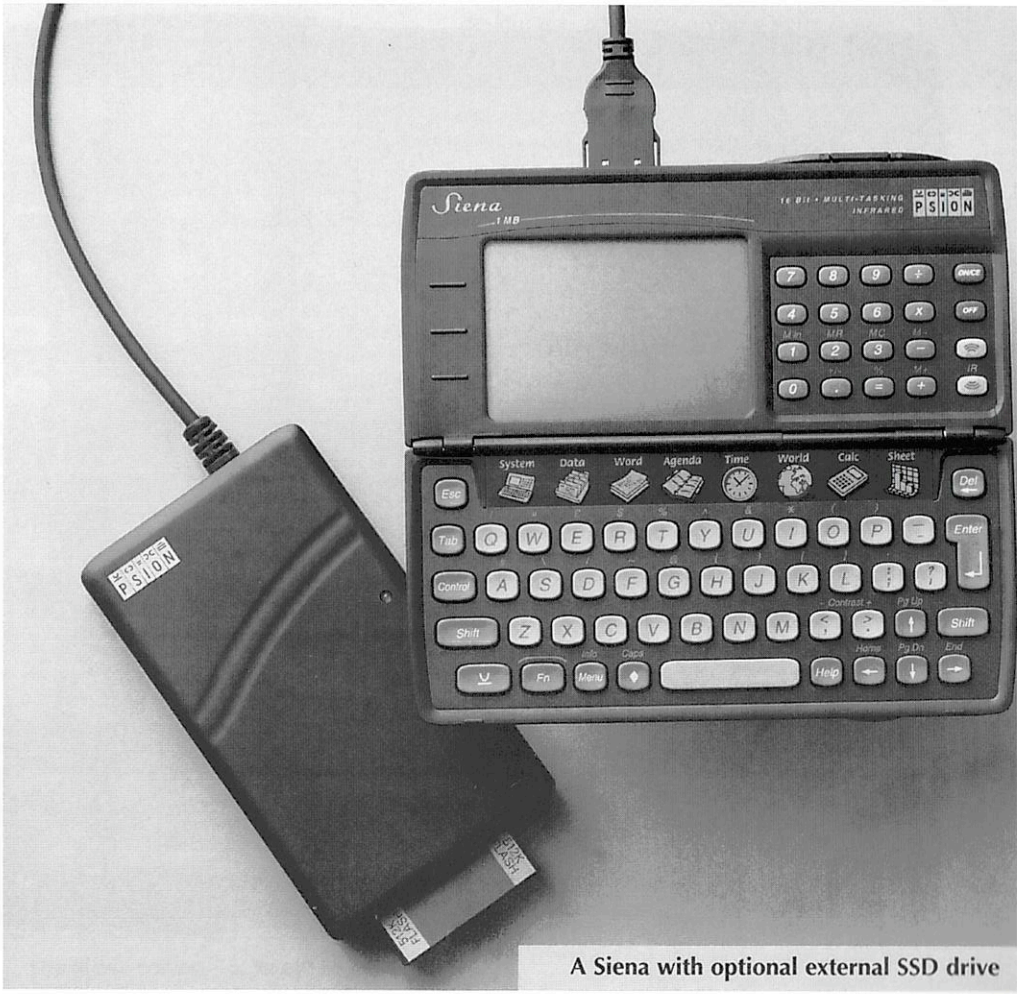
The machines are as follows:

Siena - a slightly smaller, but powerful cut-down version of the 3a. It comes in 512K and 1Mb versions.

Series 3c - physically similar to the Series 3a, but with some nice new touches. 1Mb and 2Mb versions to be available.

All four machines come with:

- Infrared communications. This allows high speed data transfer from machine to machine without physically attaching any cables—you simply put the two devices no more than about one metre apart (with the infrared windows roughly facing each other) and just 'beam' the information like with a TV remote control. This will also work with printers equipped with an IR interface, and we should see infrared receivers to allow data to be exchanged with a PC via *PsiWin* (and possibly Apple Macintosh) in the near future.

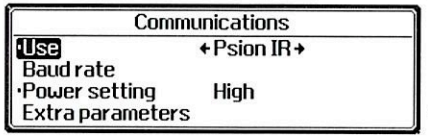


A Siena with optional external SSD drive

- A new serial port connector. The old six pin socket on the left of the Series 3/3a is no more, and has been replaced by a slim fifteen pin connector. The communications software has now been built into the machine's ROM, so the current *3Link* lead, with its bulky soap-on-a-rope, is now redundant.

The Siena, Psion's new baby!

It's smaller and it's lighter. As was expected, this new machine has been introduced as a direct rival to other handheld organisers at the lower/mid end of the market. This impressive new unit has features you wouldn't expect to find on a mere 'organiser', yet still manages to be both pocketable and easy to use.

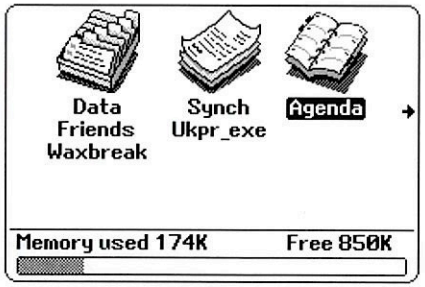


The new 'Infrared' dialog box

Siena Specifications:

Recommended retail price is expected to be £169.95 for the 512K model and £229.95 for the 1Mb unit (both including VAT).

- Screen resolution: 240 by 160 pixels (the Series 3a is 480 by 160 pixels)
- Dimensions: 150mm x 73mm x 19mm (the Series 3a is 165mm x 85mm x 22mm)
- Weight (with batteries): 183g (the Series 3a weighs 275g)
- Power: 2 x AAA batteries plus lithium battery backup.



The Siena screen—a 3a cut in half?

First Impressions

From the outside, you'll notice that the *Siena* is very different to its bigger brother. It's smaller, trendier, and spring loaded. The catch on the front releases the lock, and the machine springs open. Once opened, the serial port and infrared window are uncovered. Both halves of the machine lay flat on the desk in use, so there's nothing to tip over when you use the keyboard in the lid. Inside, the machine is also rather different:

- The screen is the same height as the 3a's, but only half as wide.
- To the right of the screen is a separate numeric keypad, in a calculator-style layout. This also incorporates separate ON and OFF keys, and two more new buttons to handle infrared send and receive.
- The keyboard is just a little more cramped than on the 3a/3c, but is still very useable. Because there are no number keys across the top of the main keyboard, special characters like @, £, $, %, etc. are all accessed in conjunction with a brand new 'Fn' key positioned between the <Psion> and <Menu> keys. The keys themselves have a nice feel, and are more curved and sculpted than their 3a/3c counterparts.

Once switched on, you'll recognise most of the built-in applications immediately, and you'll notice that the application icons on the touchpad now have

a friendlier, almost cartoon-like 3-D appearance. Most of the functionality found in the 3a has been retained, and some of the newer functions of the Series 3c have been added. The AGENDA, for instance, has a new 'Busy' view, and DATA has undergone some changes too. The *Siena* has some notable omissions:

- No SSD slots
- No spell checker/thesaurus
- No audio recording function

The heavy duty applications such as WORD and SHEET remain, as does a full implementation of OPL. Shareware authors should note that although the OPL commands remain the same, screen width will cause problems. Translating a 3a application generated a 'too wide' error almost immediately.

External software can still be loaded via the RS232 serial lead (19200 baud) or by infrared, and application icons can be installed onto the system screen as usual.

To improve the Siena's standing as a credible fashion accessory, Psion claim that the small curved battery compartment cover will be available in a variety of colours, for that little personal touch!

The Siena's 'cartoon' softkey pad

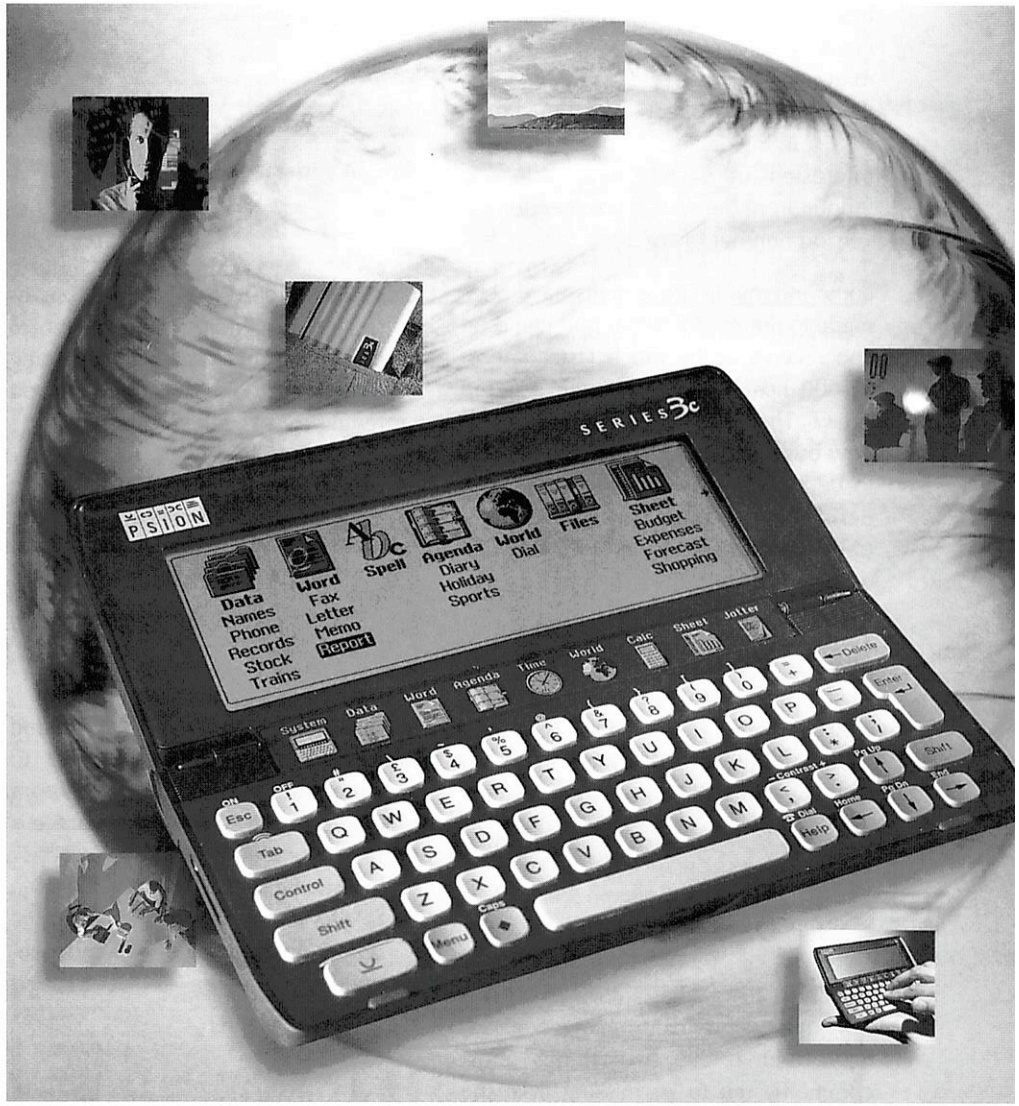
Announcing the Series 3c!

The new Series 3c comes in 1Mb and 2Mb flavours, and recommended retail prices are expected to be £339.95 and £399.95 respectively.

The suffix 'c' is allegedly to reflect the machine's new communications connectivity, but also has much to do with the fact that the American market would recognise the 'b' as representing 'beta', which would doubtless have a negative effect on sales.

At first glance from the outside there's not much difference between the 'c' and the 3a. On closer inspection you'll notice that the machine is a much darker charcoal grey colour (bordering on black), the serial port on the left has changed shape, the name badge has slid across to the centre of the lid, there's an elongated black window on the upper side of the case to the left of the battery compartment (for infrared), and the two rubber feet have changed shape. Overall construction is much as before.

When you open the machine, you'll see a few, but not many, changes. The screen is the same size and in the same position, but with a subtly curved surround which gives the machine a more modern appearance. The keyboard remains identical to the 3a. The touchpad icons have undergone a minor facelift (though they are different



to the *Siena*'s touchpad icons), and one new item appears—Jotter.

From the system screen you'll notice some minor changes, including a few new icons (although, sadly, not the Siena's impressive 3-D screen icons), plus some other changes. A new feature, 'tip of the day', appears, with the option to show useful hints on the built-in applications either once per day, each

time the machine is switched on, or never. Improvements have also been made to the help files, ranging from complex spreadsheet operations to a new 'Turning on and off' page. For those interested in such things, selecting 'About' from the system screen returns a version number of 'v5.20F'.

Some internal improvements have been made to the 3c. The serial port can send and receive at the much faster rate of 57,600 bps (19200 being the 3a's top speed). The communications software is now built into ROM, and there appears to be more provision for use of Visual Basic software (with parts of the soon-to-be-released OVAL in ROM), although details are a little sketchy at the moment.

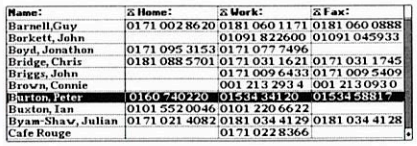
Most applications have undergone at least a minor facelift, or have had some enhancements added. Here is a brief summary of what's new (note that most of these enhancements also appear on the *Siena*):

Data

The Series 3c database has undergone a few quite significant changes. Psion have added the two things most commonly felt to be missing from the 3a's DATA application:

- **List View** - this is accessed from the diamond key, just like most of the third-party enhanced 3a database applications. Looking very much like the *JBData* and *DataView* list views, this new feature allows entries to be displayed in a spreadsheet-like tabular fashion. Entries can quickly be 'jumped to' by typing the first few letters of the name you require.

A general facelift for DATA



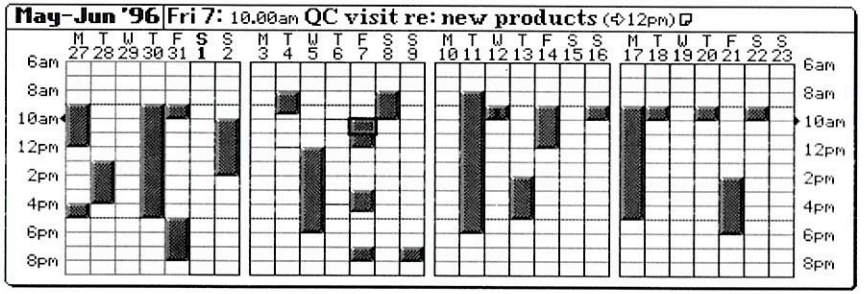
Name:	Home:	Work:	Fax:
Barnell,Guy	0171 002 8620	0181 060 1171	0181 060 0888
Borkett, John		01091 822600	01091 045933
Boyd, Jonathon	0171 095 3153	0171 077 7496	
Bridge, Chris	0181 088 5701	0171 031 1621	0171 031 1745
Briggs, John		0171 009 6433	0171 009 5409
Brown, Connie		001 213 293 4	001 213 0930
Burton-Peter	0160 740220	01534 33120	01534 38817
Buxton, Ian	0101 552 0046	0101 220 6622	
Byam-Shaw, Julian	0171 021 4082	0181 034 4129	0181 034 4128
Cafe Rouge		0171 022 8366	

List View—at last!

- **Sorting** - this is both fast and powerful. The user can select to either 'autosort' as data is being entered, or to sort when a data file is first opened. An option to 'ask before sorting' can also be found in DATA's settings. Sorting can be done on up to three fields in independently ascending or descending order.

Agenda

As well as some cosmetic tweaks, a couple of useful additions have been made to what is arguably the most powerful application on the Series 3a:


May-Jun '96
Fri 7: 10.00am QC visit re: new products (12pm)
M T W T F S S M T W T F S S M T W T F S S M T W T F S S
27 28 29 30 31 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23
6am
8am
10am
12pm
2pm
4pm
6pm
8pm

The AGENDA 'busy' view—the missing 'month view' you have been waiting for!

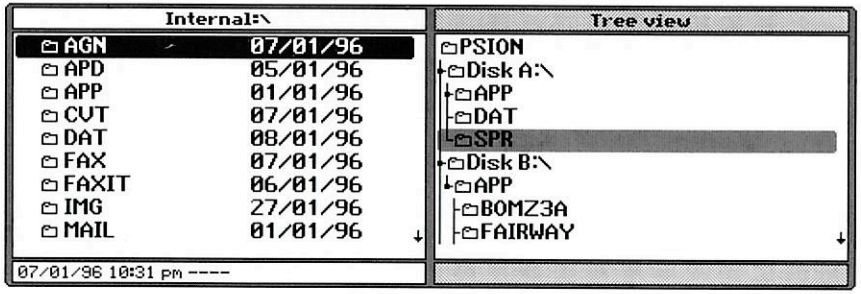
- **'Busy' view** - a completely new view giving the ability to display four weeks of activity, indicating which slots are booked and which are free. As you would expect, this is customisable.
- **Entry codes** - each entry can now be tagged with a code. Four options are available: 'None', 'Open', 'Private' and 'Restricted'. This is partly to allow better handing of entries, but mostly to provide better synchronisation with non-Psion applications such as *Lotus Organiser* and *Microsoft Schedule Plus*, both of which make use of such codes. Entry codes also give you the ability to be very specific when making appointments, so finding a 'Private Dentist Appointment' can be done very effectively.

Files

At last—a *real* built-in file manager! The old *File Selector* (accessed by the tab key in the system screen) remains, but is mostly obsolete now we have FILES.

A very powerful and very useful tool. With FILES, you can:

- Display directories on one half of the screen and files on the other.



The new 3c file manager—easy to use and fast

- Compare the contents of two directories.
- Tag files and directories.
- *Move*, copy and delete both files and directories.
- Select a status view or tree view.
- 'Associate' other programs, i.e. you can tell FILES to automatically launch your painting program when any file with a .PIC extension is accessed, or launch the word processor when any file with the .DOC extension is highlighted.
- Find a file - by file name, file type or file contents

Interestingly, looking at the 'About Files' menu option reveals that *Yellow Computing* are the brains behind this application, not Psion!

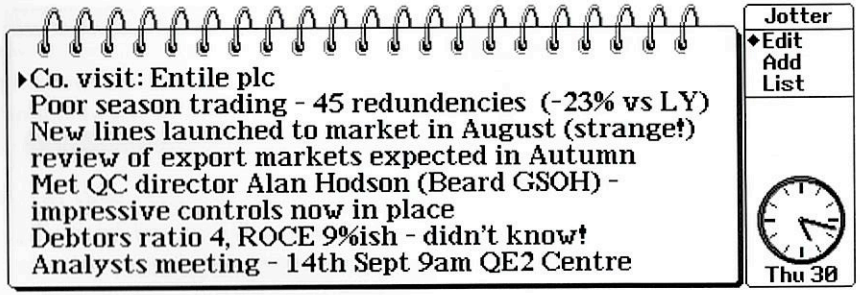
Jotter

This is a basic free form notepad for scribbling down brief notes and reminders. It is designed to be accessed quickly, negating the need to create a whole new word processor document just to take down a short note. JOTTER is hardly a heavyweight application, but has it uses nonetheless—especially when used with functions such as 'bring text' and the telephone 'dial' symbol.

JOTTER automatically opens at a blank note when you open it, ready for instant entry, and your list of 'jottings' can be sorted in either alphabetical or chronological order, which shows the most recent (or least recent) notes at the top, depending on whether you choose to sort in ascending or descending order.

Word

Mostly the same as in the 3a, but attention has been paid to some of the menu names and descriptions, as well as some improvements to the help files. Looking through the menus you will notice that the rather confusingly named 'paragraph' menu has been renamed to 'format', and the 'font' menu option has been renamed to 'paragraph font'. An additional item in the same menu, 'Character', now applies formatting to selected text only. A couple of default templates are now included with WORD, including fax and 'memo' layouts.


Jotter
Edit
Add
List
Co. visit: Entile plc
Poor season trading - 45 redundencies (-23% vs LY)
New lines launched to market in August (strange!)
review of export markets expected in Autumn
Met QC director Alan Hodson (Beard GSOH) -
impressive controls now in place
Debtors ratio 4, ROCE 9%ish - didn't know!
Analysts meeting - 14th Sept 9am QE2 Centre
Thu 30

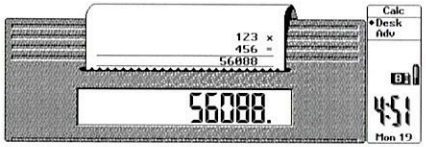
A useful 'quick and dirty' scratchpad—JOTTER

Sheet

SHEET is almost unchanged. The often confusing 'Open/close gap' menu option has been changed to 'insert cells/delete cells', but that's it. Unfortunately, Psion missed the opportunity to include an 'import' option to take in data directly from other spreadsheet packages. Arguably this can be handled by *PsiWin* though.

Sound

The 3a 'RECORD' utility has been replaced by 'SOUND', which is basically Psion's *SoundMASTER* software, previously available separately. You can now see a graphical representation of a sound's waveform, as well as being able to edit the sound, alter speed and volume, add echo and make fades.



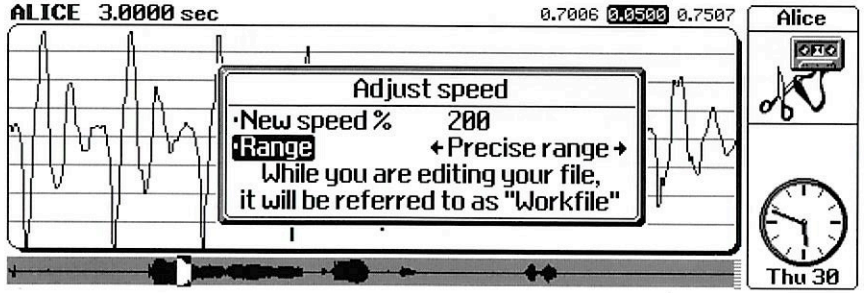
Just a little more friendly—CALC

Calculator

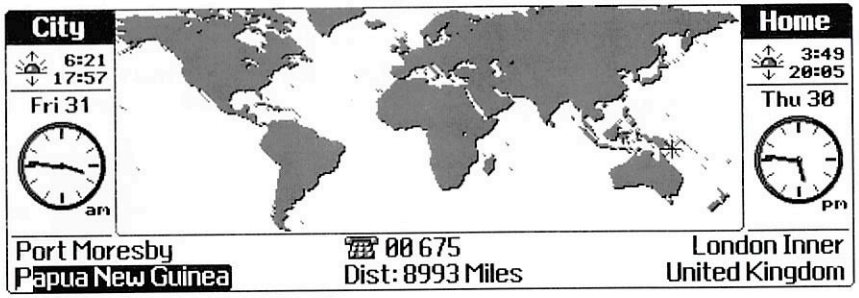
The same functionality as the 3a's CALC, but with the option to display a desktop calculator which spools your recent calculations onto a 'paper roll'.

World

It would be difficult to suggest any useful enhancements to the WORLD application, and Psion have taken the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" approach and left it much as it was on the Series 3a.



Sound(Master)—almost totally useless, but fun anyway



The World in relief, with WORLD's new 'chiselled' view

The only noticeable difference is that the 3c map is grey, and not black, although there is still an option to revert to black if required.

Time

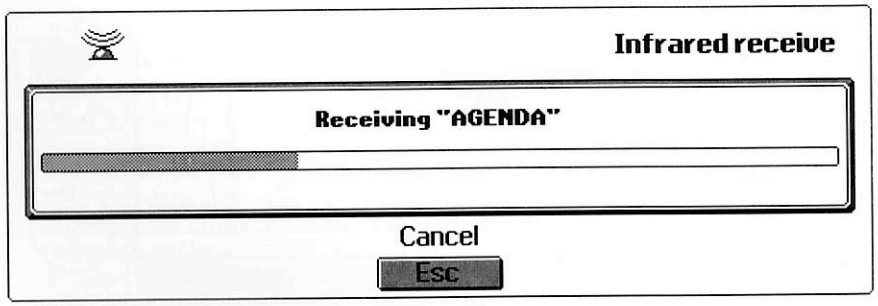
The features are all as before, but with a new, clearer clock, and a more logical layout.

Spell & Patience

Both appear to be unchanged.

The system screen

As mentioned before, the icons are mostly a little refined, and the system screen now has a 'Communications' menu in place of the 'Remote link' option, which allows selection of either the conventional *3Link* type connection or wire-less infrared transfer. High or low power transfer modes can be selected for the IR transfers, which can be used to save power if your two infrared devices are placed close enough together and directly facing each other. The IR system works beautifully for sending files between two 3c's (or Sienas, or one of each), and you can optionally elect to send either whole files, individual database records, or single AGENDA appointments.



Receiving an AGENDA file through the IR port...

Accessories

A number of other hardware items are due for immediate or imminent release:

RS232 lead / PsiWin - the existing Series 3/3a serial lead (*3Link*) and the parallel link will not work with the new machines, as the connector type is completely different. Psion plan to release a new *3Link* (without the old lozenge containing the ROM-based communication software), and have apparently made some changes to *PsiWin*. The price for *PsiWin* is expected to be unchanged, despite the simpler and cheaper construction.

PCMCIA modem adaptor - a new Psion-to-PCMCIA adaptor due for release in October, this is purely for use with a PCMCIA modem, NOT for data storage cards. This will primarily be of benefit to users with a suitable mobile phone who wish to send and receive e-mail. The adaptor requires 6 volts (from 4 AA batteries), or an external DC supply.

3Fax - the existing *3Fax* will also be incompatible with the new machines, again due to the different connector. Psion will shortly release a 14,400 bps portable fax modem in the same style casing as the *3Fax*, but WITHOUT the built-in fax software, to be called the *Psion Travel Modem*. Separate fax software will be available as an optional extra.

SSD drive - Psion will shortly be releasing a stand-alone SSD drive, which will allow fast data transfer from a *Siena* to either flash or RAM SSDs.

More in-depth discussions of the *3c* and *Siena* machines will appear in the next issue of *Palmtop*, together with full reviews of all the accessories as they become available.

Finally, we'd like to thank Stephen Pang and Joe Odukoya at Psion for taking so much of their time to demonstrate these latest Psion products to us, and for allowing us to spend a few hours trying them out for ourselves.

Pete & Steve

Upgrades?

As usual, Psion have no plans to offer any kind of upgrade path or trade-in deal on the new machines, so don't bother asking them.

As for whether you should be thinking of upgrading or changing your existing machine, you may like to read our personal comments on the new machines on the following five pages.

STOP PRESS

We have just discovered that 3c models destined for the US market will be fitted with an integral backlight. Non-US units will NOT initially have backlighting, though Psion's future plans are unknown - Ed.

Worth the wait?

After the technical discussion of the new Psion machines in the previous 12 pages, we take two independent viewpoints from a more personal angle...

by Pete Sipple and Steve Clack

The Series 3c - Pete Sipple

This is clearly an interim machine designed to ensure that Psion stay ahead of the immediate competition, but for some I feel that it will come as a disappointment. Psion users waiting for features like a backlit display, ARM processor, PCMCIA compatibility and onboard e-mail will have to wait a little longer. For many other users, myself included, the 3c will be a godsend.

Psion have taken the sensible step of not making changes merely for their own sake. All of the 3a applications work, and work well, so why change them? However, it would seem that Psion have been listening to what users have to say, and have incorporated a number of small improvements that were really needed. Many shareware authors won't be pleased to find out that their applications are about to become surplus, now that we have onboard:

- The addition of 'list' and 'sort' to DATA.
- Four weeks at a view—the AGENDA view missing from the 3a.
- FILES - the much needed file manager.
- JOTTER - the middle ground between WORD documents and AGENDA's to-do lists.

Other improvements, such as the clearer TIME layout, and the tweaks to the help files and menu descriptions will benefit a lot of new users, and make the machine just that little bit more friendly to use.

The new infrared link is very impressive. It's easy to use and pretty fast, but I can't help feeling that, until an IR link to a desktop machine becomes available, most users won't have anyone (or any*thing*) to talk to by IR. The threefold improvement to the *3Link* transfer rate is an excellent step, as is the decision to put the communications software into ROM, making for a serial lead that is smaller and easier to carry .

I must admit to being a little surprised that the basic construction hasn't altered much: I partly expected to see changes to the hinge, or the touchpad ribbon cable. I was also slightly disappointed that the 3c icons didn't receive the same treatment as the Siena—those attractive 3-D icons with trendy shadowing effect would have been a nice touch!

So, will I buy one? *You bet!*

The Series 3c - Steve Clack

Sitting on the train returning home from our *3c* and *Siena* viewing (and writing this article on my trusty 3a, of course) I began to reflect on all we had seen that afternoon. Four new machines in two categories, one very much an attractively facelifted 3a, the other something of a wolf in sheep's clothing. So where do they all fall in the grand scheme of things, and who should buy one?

Well, at the prices Psion have quoted it is evident that the appeal of both 1Mb and 2Mb 3a machines will fall to virtually zero overnight. Discarding the numerous small software 'tweaks' in their entirety, the hardware upgrades of the 56,700bps RS232 link and high speed infrared communications just *have* to be worth the extra money to anyone who makes more than occasional use of the serial link.

Of the software upgrades, the only new 'application', Jotter, is hardly a powerful tool by any stretch of the imagination, but fills a useful gap in the functionality of previous machines, and nicely rounds off the impressive suite of applications built into the basic 3c machines.

Perhaps more important than this new 'app' is the addition of a list view in the database and an effective 'month' view in AGENDA. These were both obvious omissions from the 3a, and shareware or commercial programs had already been created to plug the gap. The list view and sort capability of the new DATA will undoubtedly drain sales from all the third-party database applications, though all of them still offer many more features than DATA alone. The shareware month viewer for the 3a is a good product, but could never integrate with AGENDA in the way that the new 'busy' view does. This is a tidy means of finishing off an otherwise excellent application. The ability to categorise diary entries is of significance for the all-important synchronisation with desktop PIMs, and shows that Psion is treating

this strategically important connectivity issue with the gravity it deserves.

The inclusion of SoundMASTER into the RECORD utility is of little more than amusement value, and the persistent lack of voice annotations to documents still strikes me as a mistake. This was first promised (but never delivered) on Psion's MC400 laptop of more than 6 years ago, and it seems no closer to a reality now than it did back then. I continue to see the whole 'digital audio' facility of the 3a/3c range as a waste of time, space and resources; how many people *really* need to record their dog barking as a wake-up call? A simple loud buzzer would have been adequate.

I'm far less disappointed at the lack of extra features in the word processor and spreadsheet. These were both quite capable and well rounded applications in their 3a (and indeed Series 3) guise, and no major holes were obvious. Sure, I would have been happy to see auto numbering of bulleted lists and the ability to add 'proper' tables and graphics into WORD documents. I would also like to be able to use borders and shading in the spreadsheet, and to annotate graphs and import them into WORD, but in terms of everyday functionality for the average user I'm happy enough with things as they are. Pure economics dictate that Psion's wish-list for all the new machines would have been tempered by availability of ROM space in any case, so we can't simply expect an endless string of additions and enhancements with no price penalty.

The new FILES utility is a helpful extension to the old 'file selector', which was invariably difficult for the computer novice to get to grips with. The facility to *move* files as well as copy them is a very welcome addition.

Cosmetic changes like the cleaner looking TIME and WORLD screens with their new circular analog clocks and the 3-D relief effect of the world map are no more than icing on the cake, as is the more 'friendly' looking calculator screen. These little things shouldn't be ignored or sneered at though; many people still find palmtop computers quite daunting and complex beasts, so anything the manufacturers can do to make their products a little more friendly and accessible must surely be a wise move.

On the hardware side there has been a fair amount of nipping and tucking, just as with the software. The almost-but-not-quite-identical casing has been subtly changed to give a slightly more modern appearance (in my opinion, at least), and the new rubber feet are mounted on little 'pods' that look like something you'd see attached to the side of the *Starship Enterprise*!

The infrared capability will soon make everyone wonder how they managed in the days when they had to mess with cables—at least when the infrared unit becomes available for the PC end. As usual I'd expect non-PC users like myself to be left out in the cold here, and we're probably doomed to use that

quaint old cable link for the indefinite future. Please, *please*, make some more effort for the non-PC world out there Psion. I *know* that around 90% of people use PCs nowadays, and it constitutes an immensely powerful market force, but the remaining 10% is still tens of thousands of users, who will continue to grind their teeth in frustration at you until you do something more to help.

Going back to the IR link, I've seen it done before with *Apple Newtons*, but watching two 3c's sitting opposite each other on a desk just 'beaming' data to each other still made me smile. Psion have sensibly added the ability to beam individual database records and AGENDA appointments, and I fully expect to see lots of this going on at the very next user's meeting!

For those convinced that they actually *want* a 3c, the question of availability leaps prominently to mind. I remember only too well the scarcity problems when the 3a first came out, and again with the 1Mb and 2Mb versions. I can only hope that we're not all kept waiting for too long beyond the early-September release date before we can get our hands on these desirable machines.

In summary then, the 3c really isn't going to set the world alight, but the 3a was (and still is) an immensely powerful little computer, and the 3c just hones that power a little. With the recent price drop of the 1Mb and 2Mb 3a machines I expect to see no more than a £30 price difference between equivalent sized 3a's versus 3c's, and for this premium the c's look like excellent value for money.

In terms of an upgrade for existing 3a users the most compelling reason is most certainly the significantly faster communications. If you can live without 57,600 bps then you can just stick with your add-on database and month viewer programs, forget those cute little rubber feet, and keep saving for the *real* upgrade: the Series 4 (or whatever they call it)—whenever that might appear.

The *Siena* - Pete Sipple

An excellent product. Its size and weight catch you a little off-guard, and the new styling initially feels odd to the diehard 3a user. The spring-loaded case is a nice touch, and the layout and feel of the machine will certainly appeal to someone upgrading from a filofax or some 'lesser' electronic organiser.

The inclusion of the 3a/3c 'power apps' surprised me a little: they're the kind of things I wouldn't expect to find on an 'organiser'. Before I saw the *Siena*, I speculated that any cut-down machine would be devoid of SHEET, WORD or OPL, but expected to see a notepad, and maybe the spell checker (to eat into the pocket crossword-solver market).

It will be interesting to see how the shareware market develops for the *Siena*. Almost no existing software will run, due to the width restriction, so it's likely that some shareware authors will

start to work on re-writes for the smaller screen. Personally, I wonder how many new users will purchase the optional and relatively expensive serial lead. With the Siena's battery backup, users may not feel the need to back up data to their PC, and want to make a false economy in this area.

The *Siena* - Steve Clack

I too was surprised to see almost the full suite of 3a/3c software incorporated into the *Siena*. Not because of the half-sized screen, as this works surprisingly well, but because some of these are exceptionally powerful programs to put onto something aimed more at the 'organiser' market. I'm also surprised and disappointed that the excellent 3a spell checker has not been included. This is a most useful tool to keep in a pocket-sized device, and I wonder how many *Siena* owners will also carry a dedicated electronic spell checker with them too.

Exclusion of the digital audio and *Patience* game were obvious moves, but the omission of the new 3c FILES and JOTTER are harder to fathom. With ease-of-use being so paramount for this product, the slick new file manager would have been easier for the beginner to get to grips with, though of course with an absence of SSD slots (except as an add-on box) the requirement to move files around is greatly diminished.

Jotter would have been a prime candidate for the *Siena*, which I would expect to be used more for brief notes than long documents, if only because of the rather small screen.

Criticisms apart, Psion have still managed to shoehorn a massive amount of functionality into such a tiny box, and the sheer power of the thing is impressive. As always with Psion products the machine is a beautiful piece of engineering design, and the *Siena* in particular has undoubted style and 'sex appeal'. With the neat numeric keypad in the lid it is much better than the 3a/3c for entering large quantities of numbers, and I actually prefer the overall styling of the *Siena*.

The pricing of the two *Siena* models puts them clearly in the mid-to-upper end of the palmtop market, which still leaves a gaping hole around the £100 price point. In many ways I'm surprised that Psion have pitched the *Siena* so high in the range, and it appears that Psion will continue to leave this end of the market to the likes of Casio and Sharp.

For those requiring the flexibility of add-on storage the *Siena* has some very definite limitations. The external SSD drive may be useful for backups to those without access to a desktop computer, but it is hardly a good solution for running software. The availability of add-on software remains to be seen, though the inclusion of full-blown OPL with the *Siena* will certainly encourage this. For those with more modest requirements, the *Siena* is a powerful and highly desirable little computer.

Shareware Shorts

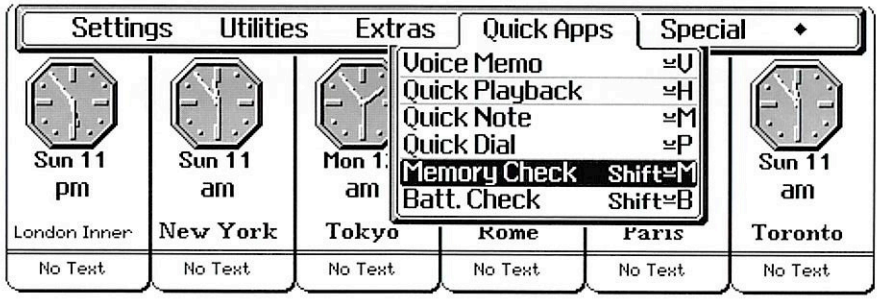
There's never a shortage of new shareware for the 3a—material comes out almost every day. Pete Sipple takes a look at some of the newest additions to the arsenal, and browses the file lists to see what updated software you need to look out for ...

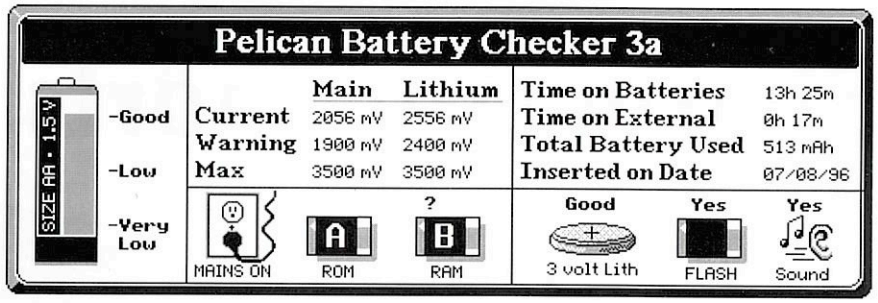
Take time to look out for this one...

TimeMan, written by P.K. Spencer encompasses many useful time-related utilities and puts them together under one shell. Features include displaying of multiple world clocks, one-touch voice memos with one-touch playback, a quick dialling facility, quick memo taking, memory checker, stopwatch, and a whole lot more. It's a small file, and is definitely worth looking out for. **TIMEMN33.ZIP** (29Kb in size)

Power to the people...

Pelican Software's battery checker looks after every aspect of your 3a's power, including the main and backup





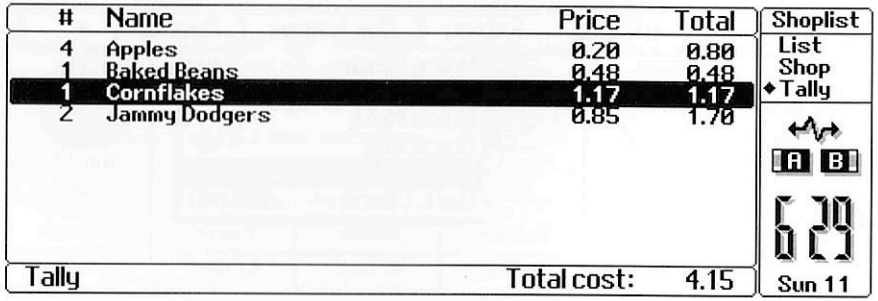
batteries, external power, RAM SSDs and *3Fax*. Note that your *3Fax* doesn't need to be connected for Battery Checker to give you the information. **BATCHK.ZIP** (8K)

Join the queue...

ShopList, by Hugh Matthews, is designed to make the process of shopping simpler. As well as managing your shopping list it provides a pick list of regularly-purchased items, keeps track of prices, and learns the aisle layout of your supermarket. Each item belongs to a category, and contains the price, quantity, store and aisle from the last time it was purchased. Comprehensive and flexible—I loved the 'impulse buy' option, but I'm not sure that I'm ready to go strolling around the supermarket with a basket in one hand and a 3a in the other *just* yet. **SHOPLIST.ZIP** (24K)

Something to hide?

PassAgn v1.7 is one of those very useful applications that fills a gap left by Psion. Add this to your system screen, remove the Agenda application, and your diary is password protected—something I'm surprised isn't a default option on the 3a. According to the accompanying text file, the author is a 15 year old who's new to programming. I'm impressed! **PASSAGN.ZIP** (7K)



What else is new?

PriCalc 1.03 is described as the ultimate sales person's assistant. Essential for anyone dealing with discounts and mark-ups. The program stores products and their details and then allows you to apply five mark-up or mark-down percentages. **PRICALC.ZIP** (14K)

Undelete v1.00 is the first release of this utility for Flash SSD disks. It runs on the Series 3a only, and will copy data from deleted files to another file. If you need to recover deleted data from a Flash SSD, look out for **UNDELETE.ZIP** (6K)

S3A Invest v1.4a allows you to keep track of the performance of up to 50 investments such as shares, stocks or bonds. The main screen holds all the details of each investment, including latest price and total value of the portfolio. A second screen is available for each investment and for the total value, giving a graphical representation of the historical performance and an overall gain (or loss) figure. **S3AINV4.ZIP** (43K)

NagMaker. Shareware authors use 'nag' screens as a way to encourage users to pay the registration fee for their hard work. Tell *NagMaker* about your program, and it will generate the appropriate code to create nag screens on a random basis. Shareware cost is $20, and if you don't pay up you'll feel really, really guilty. **NAGMAKER.ZIP** (19K)

Updated since the last issue:

Top of the shareware charts, **Mapper** is now at version **4.4**. Towns, roads, rivers, hotels, things to do, sports facilities, STD and postal codes, town plans and lots more. **MAPA44.ZIP**

Three of the major shareware finance packages have recently been updated. **DPBANK13.ZIP** (80K) (which now includes printing and categories), **BANKP20.ZIP** (35K) (now with currency conversion) and the latest version of Alan Richey's **S3ABANK8.ZIP** (262K)

Draw v2.81a from Chocolate Island Software is the latest version of this useful shareware bitmap editor. **DRAW281A.ZIP** (55K)

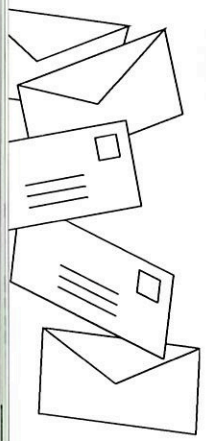
Websurf v1.62 is now available. If you'd like to read WWW pages offline, just look for **WBSRF162.ZIP** (46K)

Memory v1.2. A challenging memory game—discover hidden pairs of pictures before the clock stops. New layout, extra levels. **MEMO12.ZIP** (50K)

Reader v2.3 Barry Childress' excellent text reader. **READER23.ZIP** (83K)

BUSDAT 3.2. Keep your business and home contact information together with this fixed-format database. Now includes a Zoom function, by popular request. **BUSDAT.ZIP** (20K)

If you're having difficulty finding a particular piece of shareware, or you think there's a program that I've missed, please e-mail me at petesipple@aol.com



Readers' Letters

The author of the most interesting letter submitted for issue 9 will receive a leather Series 3/3a case!

PRIZE LETTER - Jonathan Thomas wins a free leather case for his sage comments on data loss...

A solemn plea

Dear Palmtop,

Well, the worst nightmare of every Psion owner has happened to me. My trusty 2Mb 3a was stolen during a burglary to my home—along with other property needless to say.

I expect you can imagine how incredibly inconvenient it is, and of course how very angry I feel. I am only glad that I made a record of the serial number to give to the police and had backed up the information to my PC via PsiWin. Mind you, I hadn't backed up for a couple of weeks (my own fault I know). Thank goodness they didn't take the PC as well!

Do you know if Psion keep a database of stolen machines in case they are contacted by people trying to get a manual or have the machine repaired or enquiring after how to crack the user password? If they don't, I think it would be a good idea.

Thankfully my Psion was password protected, with certain information protected a second time with a different password in the word processor or the memo function of the agenda. Mind you, I was a little concerned to know if the passwords can be cracked. Can you tell me if this is possible?

In reality I expect that the thief would want to clear all the information in order to be able to sell the machine. To do this I would expect them to remove all the batteries, thus clearing all the information. Would removing all the batteries have this effect, i.e. reset the machine to its factory state?

It is easy for us all to become complacent, but I would urge all Psion owners to remember the following points. They may seem tiresome, but are essential in modern society:

- Always use a password, and make it one you have to enter each time you use the machine. Make it at least three digits long and nothing too obvious.
- Use a second, different password to protect important documents in other applications wherever possible.
- Always back up your data—at least the essential stuff—as often as you can. I would say *at least* once a week depending on how often you use your machine. If you can't back up to a PC then use a flash disk and store the disk separately!
- Make a note of the model and serial number of your machine and mark it with your postal code and house number using an ultra violet pen.

Keep your Psion safe and as close to you as possible. My next one will sleep under my pillow with me!

This may all seem tedious, but remember: someone out there wants your Psion, and he doesn't want to buy it from you. Above all else, don't think it won't happen to you. That's what I did!

Should anyone come across a 2Mb 3a machine, serial number FBD4042045, consider it HOT PROPERTY.

Jonathan Thomas.
(address supplied)

A story to chill the hearts of all Psion users. It's bad enough to lose all of your valuable personal information that was stored on your machine, but to think that someone else may have free access to misuse that information is frightening.

I'm sure that Psion *don't* keep a log of serial numbers as you suggest, and don't forget that the serial number is only attached to a small peel-off label anyway, so it is really a poor means of tracking down stolen computers (unfortunately).

On the password issue I understand that the main system password is pretty secure, but that individual document passwords are relatively easy to crack—as they only encrypt the file contents in a fairly rudimentary fashion.

It's so difficult to fully appreciate the importance of regular backups until you've had the personal misfortune it takes for most of us to learn the lesson. See Stephen Murgan's article on page 86 for some interesting thoughts on this important subject...

Finally, extracting the main batteries will *not* remove all of the data within the machine, at least not until the backup battery is exhausted. Removing the backup battery too will certainly erase everything though, as will performing a HARD reset - Ed.

More SSD mayhem...

Dear Palmtop,

After reading some *Palmtop* back issues I noted much discussion on the relative price of SSDs as compared to PCMCIA devices. There were many complaints about the high prices and many excuses given, but are we really comparing like with like? I don't profess to be a technical expert, but there seem to be at least two areas of potential difference that may explain the price discrepancy:

- Size. SSDs are still smaller than PCMCIAs and a lot smaller than the type three cards that offer the larger memory capacity.
- Electrical power used. Though I don't know for sure it seems to me that the SSDs must use dramatically less power than either PCMCIA cards. I assume that the lower power chips used in the Psion SSDs are probably more expensive.

The other side of the argument is that surely the Psion's requirements should allow the chips to be much slower than the fast RAM required for modern 486 and Pentium class PCs. This surely should make them cheaper?

I'm sure that few users would want Psion to switch to using PCMCIA cards if it meant that either we could only have one (as they are bigger) or that our battery life will be halved—or worse. Does anyone know the real specs?

As our esteemed editor perhaps you could swing some weight around with Psion to get their view on all this discussion?

I find it very embarrassing every time I show off my 3a to others, then I inevitably get the big question—how much—and try and explain away the seemingly-ridiculous price of 2½Mb worth of SSDs. This immediately puts people off the Psion, and it is hard to convince someone used to PCs with Gigabyte hard disks that they will never outgrow a 2Mb series 3a.

Finally, if Psion can't respond then let's hope that the influence of the new third-party SSD manufacturer (Exportech) can shake things up a little. Maybe they might like to make some comment as to why their products are more expensive than PC equivalents?

Keith Harding
Wellington, New Zealand

The deluge continues. We are now getting a steady stream of correspondence relating to SSD prices, almost all of it vigorously condemning Psion.

The issue of power consumption is certainly true, and the inclusion of PCMCIA would most certainly have a serious effect on battery life. The question is whether the average user would rather pay less for a unit that is produced in high volume (PCMCIA) and therefore substantially cheaper, but with a shorter battery life. As PCMCIA becomes more widely adopted the price (and eventually the power consumption will improve further, thus widening the discrepancy with the much lower-volume Psion SSD products).

Psion will probably be condemned by users no matter which route they choose, as there is already a large base of Series 3/3a owners with SSDs, and if Psion decides to drop them in favour of PCMCIA for the next major computer they release then many people will feel aggrieved that their investment in SSDs is then wasted.

Either way, there is an overwhelming consensus from users that SSDs *are* too expensive, so perhaps if everyone were to write a letter to Psion saying so it would be a useful force for change? - Ed.

Giant databases!

I wonder if you or your readers can help me? I have a large Database on my Psion—nearly 2Mb, comprising 28,000 individual records of around 120 characters each, split into 4 fields. It's actually a log of our record library. I wanted a table layout, so bought *DataDeluxe 2.0*. This worked, but with some distinct drawbacks:

- The merge-in function did not work.
- Searching worked across all fields, and with such a large database this made it slow. I wanted to search the 'artist' field only, but this is not supported on version 2.5 either, so after your review I bought *DataView Pro*. This seemed a delight to use, particularly the column width adjustments, but I later discovered that it can only cope with 16,000 records—so is totally useless for our application.

What do you suggest?

Robert Owen
Hertford

I'm afraid that you're getting to the limit of what it is reasonable to expect the Psion to be capable of Robert. 28,000 records (albeit reasonably short ones) is a pretty hefty chunk of data by anyone's standards, and this is probably more suited to a machine with rather more raw computing power than the little 3a.

The only useful suggestion I can give is to try splitting the database into some more bite-sized pieces. Something in the order of 2-5000 records apiece would be more reasonable, and you can experiment with different file sizes to find the optimum combination of speed and usability.

I realise that this is a non-optimal solution, and if your database simply cannot be broken into smaller pieces then you may have to resort to a bigger computer - Ed.

A Closer Look...

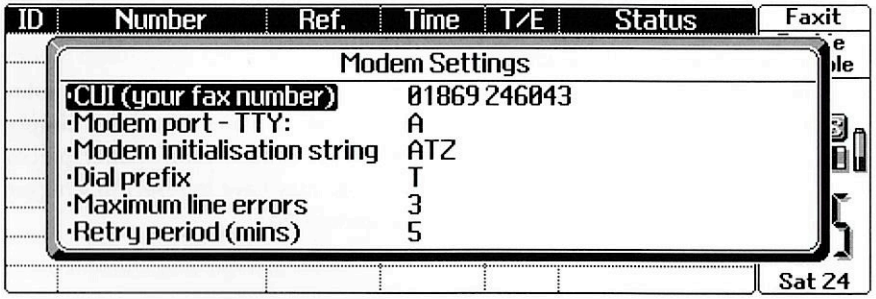
...at some of the newest & most interesting products available for your Series 3/3a

Microfax Fax Modem

For mobile users looking to keep in touch with base this little fax modem could be the answer, as it can send and receive faxes as well as being a powerful data modem.

Physically, this small black box weighs just 120g, and is a little over half as long as a Series 3a, with the vital statistics of 110 x 97 x 12mm. It can be powered from a 9 volt mains transformer, or from an optional battery pack which provides around 20 hours of power from four AA cells.

The unit has four external connections, two of which are RJ11 sockets (for RS232 and telephone line), one for the 9V power and the other for connection to a parallel printer. Two LEDs report the operational status, and a pushbutton on the side serves to answer incoming calls, as well as to alter some of the internal settings. With only one LED reporting the status it's a little unclear what the modem is up to at any given time, but a handy warble lets you know when the modem's being addressed.



The *faxit* software

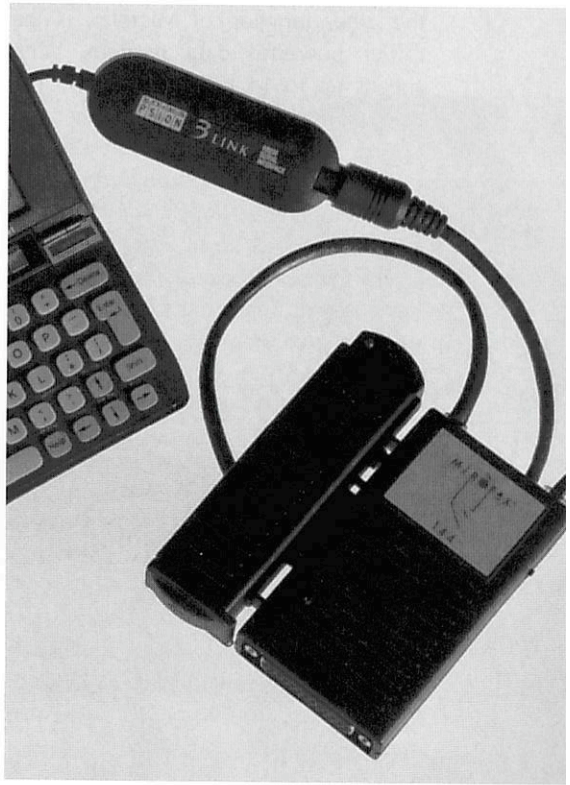
At the time of writing I have not received the official fax software from the manufacturer, but I understand that the popular *faxit* shareware program is to be distributed with the Microfax in the very near future. I therefore tested the unit using version 1.4 of *faxit*. Installing and setting up a 'send' for the first time was a little awkward, as the faxing process is a two part operation. I leapt in without reading the manual, and sat wondering why nothing was happening before I realised that a 'scheduled' fax just sits in a queue waiting for the go-ahead to be sent. Once I'd come to terms with this my first Microfax fax was successfully transmitted.

Users of the *3Fax* will note that this unit boasts a 'receive' capability too, something previously unavailable to Psion owners. As faxes are received as images and not text, the file size would, I thought, be too large for the 3a. In reality the Microfax can receive and store up to around 15 pages of faxes in its 4Mb of onboard RAM. They still can't be viewed on the Series 3a—just stored in the Microfax unit itself ready for sending directly to a printer.

Microfax claims to be able to print to 24 pin dot matrix, inkjet and laser printers. After a lot of messing around with my *Canon BJ30* I gave up attempting to get Microfax to print anything other than garbage. I also tried a *Citizen Swift* printer, but apart from a lot of bleeps was unable to print anything readable.

As the manual states that Microfax sends to an HP laser printer by default, I hoped I'd have more luck with a *Canon LBP4* laser printer, but I still got just a page of gibberish.

The modem is reportedly able to detect whether a laser or ink jet printer is



connected, and select the appropriate driver by itself. If this detection fails, two presses of the pushbutton allow the modes to be changed, but as a single press switches the unit into 'receive' mode it took a few attempts to get this working. The manual states that in some cases the printer will need to be switched to 'Alternative Graphics Mode' to enable printing to work: it's possible that with perseverance I could have got this to work, but Microfax seems to wipe the fax data from RAM if a print attempt fails, which isn't helpful when you're trying to test the connection.

As well as Class 3 fax communications, the other function of Microfax is the rather powerful data modem. With speeds up to 14,400 bps, v32bis, and responding to AT commands, this beats Psion's *3Fax* by a long way, and makes contacting other computers and services like CompuServe much more viable. Reading reports from other users, it seems that there have been some problems when connecting to some online services, including CiX via ReadCix, but I was able to connect to CompuServe as well as a colleague's BBS without any problems.

The communications package supplied with the Microfax is a demonstration version of Widget's VT100 communications package, though it has a restricted baud rate of 1200 bps to frustrate users into buying the full package (at £58.75 inc. VAT). Software and RS232 leads to connect to the 3a or PC are also supplied.

Overall, a small and powerful fax modem, but I had more than my fair share of problems getting Microfax to work. I've also yet to see the final version of the software, so it's difficult to report on just how easy this product will be when used 'in the field'. Generally impressive, but you might need a *lot* of patience when setting it up for the first time!

Pete Sipple

InfoBOX

The Microfax can be obtained directly from:

Microfax Modems Ltd
Conbar House
Mead Lane
Hertford
Hertfordshire SG13 7AS

tel/fax: +44 (0)1992 505744

or from Clove Technology in the UK. Tel: +44 (0)1202-302796.

The Microfax 144 fax modem costs £169 (excl. VAT), the battery pack is £21, and a separate RS232 link is £12.

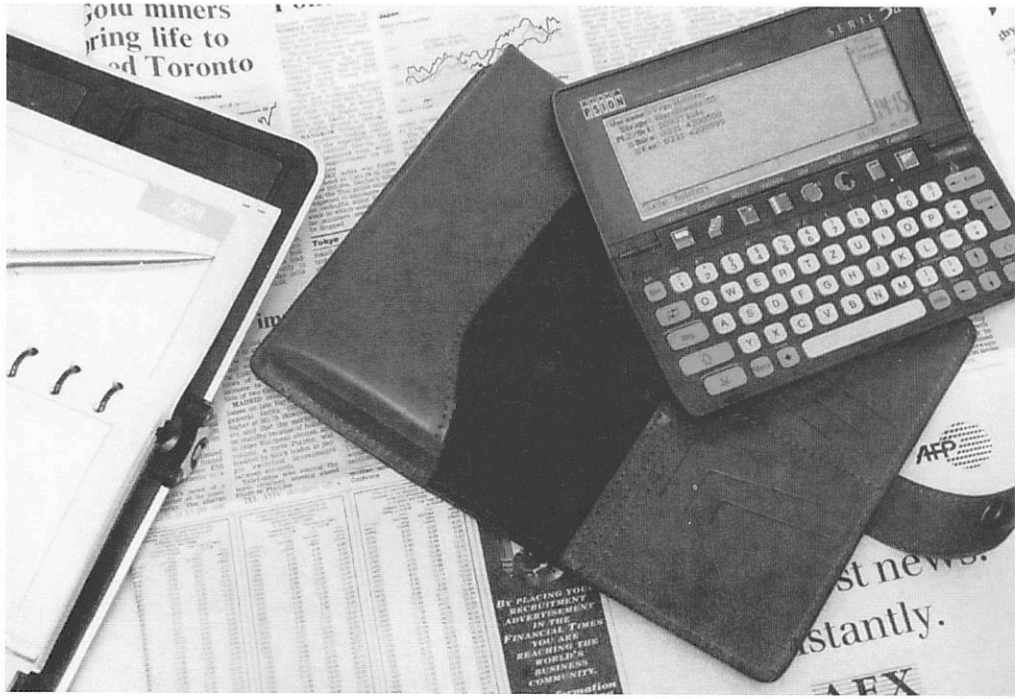
Vega holsters

We've covered a broad range of cases, wallets and holsters for the 3a in past issues of *Palmtop*, ranging from simple leather slip cases to ones big enough to house the computer, fax modem, SSDs and papers. Quality has varied from good to excellent, but nothing of quite the solidity and beauty of the Vega range.

Originally a manufacturer of gun holsters, Vega have now moved into cases for computers, phones, cameras and portable stereos , offering a good range of very high quality protection for the Series 3 owner.

Wallet Holster

It seems strange to call this a 'holster' as it is simply a *filofax*-style case, with no means of attaching it to your body. As with the entire Vega range reviewed here it is available in black or tan leather. This is my favourite of the cases reviewed here, and looks quite stunning when viewed from any angle. The leather in all these cases is extremely thick (at around 2mm), and the wallet holster is lined with a luxurious green velvet material. The wallet is closed by a loop with a sturdy metal stud fastener, and the leather is stitched around the edges with a thick and durable thread. Opening the wallet reveals a large



leather pocket for the computer, and opposite a document pouch with slits cut to accept a couple of SSDs plus credit cards and a few small papers. An elastic loop on the edge of the pocket allows you to slot a pen into the wallet, and holds it firmly in place whatever the size. The generous cut of the case means that all of the above can be housed without the case getting seriously pulled out of shape, which was often a problem with cases we have reviewed in the past.

As with all the Vega holsters, the opulence of their design comes at a price. Firstly they are not cheap, though they are all simply such gorgeous quality that I can't fault them for value-for-money. Secondly, the thick leather makes them substantially more bulky than their more modest rivals, which is hardly a neat idea when you're trying to make your 3a as portable and light-weight as possible. The overall dimensions of the wallet holster are around 175 x 110 x 50mm, and the empty wallet weighs a not-insignificant 160g.

The wallet is quite suitable for carrying in briefcase or large handbag, or can just be carried in your hand—don't expect this to fit in any suit jacket pocket: the bulge alone would make you look like either a terrorist or a secret agent.

The wallet holster is available at £39.95 including VAT.

Belt Holster

Another solid and carefully designed product. The belt holster sports the same finish as all the other Vega cases, with a large *Velcro* pad to hold down the cover flap. The sides of the case are discreetly elasticated to ensure that your Psion fits snugly within, and the tough plastic loop on the back is wide enough for the thickest belt. The loop is open at the bottom, which avoids having to take off your belt to thread the case through, but the open end of the rigid loop hooks back on itself to prevent the case from slipping off your belt if you move around too vigorously. If you want even better security, then you are still provided with a conventional loop too. Attractive, sturdy and practical.

The belt holster costs £39.95 inc. VAT.

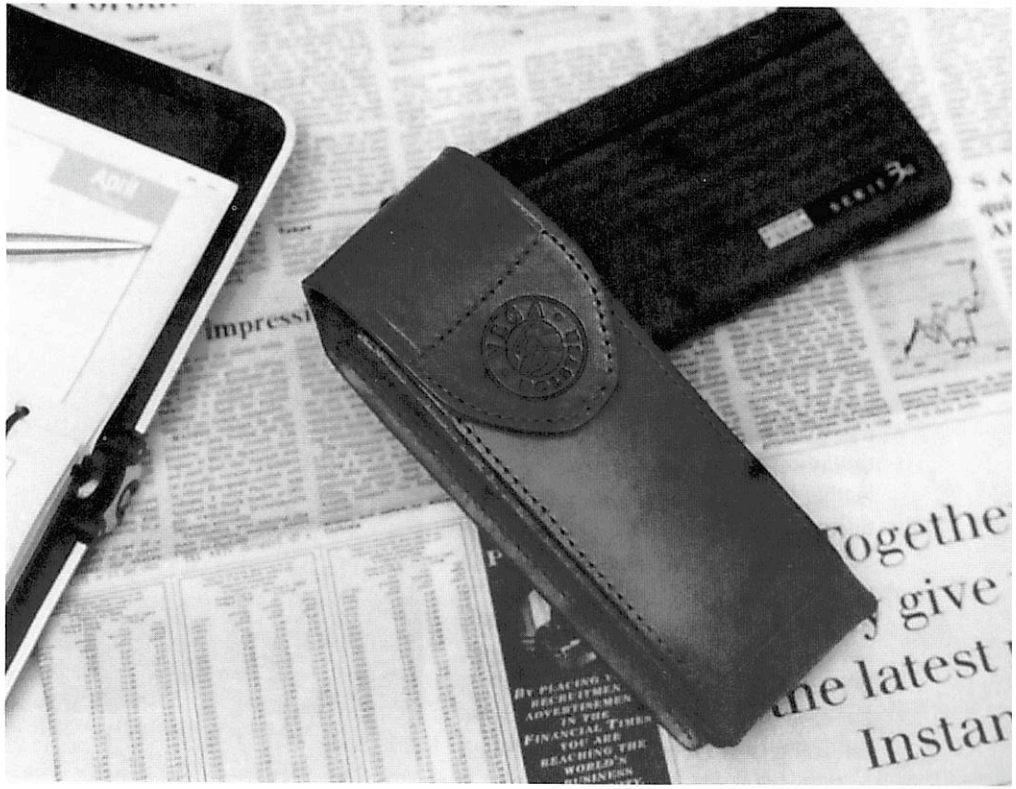
Belt holster for *3Fax*

This is basically a narrower version of the Series 3 belt holster, designed to fit Psion's own *3Fax* portable modem, but otherwise identical. The only disadvantage of carrying both this and the other belt case are that you may soon end up looking like *Batman*, with an ever-expanding utility belt full of gadgets. Just make sure that you don't have a belt holster for your portable phone or personal stereo too!

The modem belt holster costs £39.95 inc. VAT.

SSD wallet

Dedicated SSD cases have always seemed a bit superfluous to me, as they are small and compact units ideally sized to tuck into a small pocket or your ordinary money wallet or purse anyway. Still, I guess it's not a bad idea to keep the dust off them, and the amply-sized twin-SSD Vega wallet neatly holds two of them, and closes with a hefty press-stud. At £14.99 including VAT it's not cheap, but at least it should make your expensive SSDs indestructible. The case is 105 by 80 by around 25mm thick.



Shoulder holster

Not the thing for everyone, but the shoulder holster will keep your pride and joy firmly attached to your persons no matter what kind of acrobatics you like to get up to. You put the thing on by threading one arm through a large leather loop, then thread the other (elasticated) half of the strap behind your back and put your other arm through that. The case part, which is identical to the belt holster then sits a few inches below your left armpit, ready for a quick draw. you can stop the bottom end of the case from flapping up and down by threading a small extension through your belt, thus making the whole thing completely immobile.

I found this device immensely uncomfortable despite all the straps being adjustable, and just can't imagine anyone resorting to this as a means of toting their 3a. Each to his or her own though, and I'm sure this is exactly what someone out there is looking for. For anyone used to carrying a concealed pistol will find this case much to their liking, but for most of use something a little more conventional will probably be a better idea.

If you buy it and decide that you just can't get along with the holster then you can always pull the straps out and use it as a simple belt holster (without the plastic loop). This case sells for £49.95 including VAT.

In summary, the Vega range are the last word in quality cases for your Psion, with the caveat that in most cases they are also the bulkiest and heaviest too. For myself I'm still happy to stick with my £10 slip case, but if you know someone who prefers quality and appearance over compactness then any of the Vega cases would make a wonderful gift. They all have the Vega logo (a pistol in a holster) embossed into the leather, and are presented in either attractive presentation cases, or neat little drawstring bags.

Steve Clack

InfoBOX

Vega holsters and cases are available from selected Psion dealers, or directly from Vega:

Vega
Bamford Village Centre
Martlett Avenue
Rochdale OL11 5QY

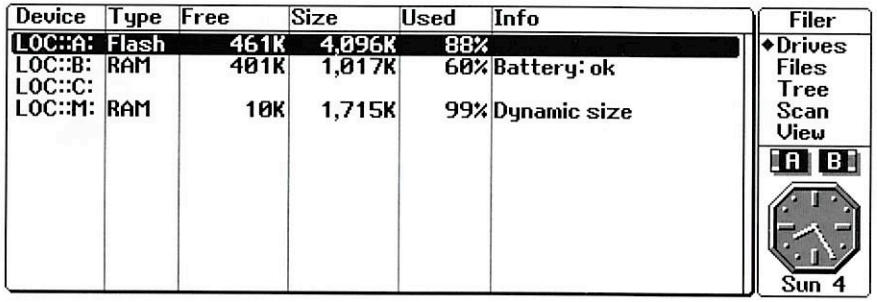
tel: +44 (0)1706 44177
fax: +44 (0)1706 44435

Filer

Filer is yet another replacement for the 3a's built-in *File Selector*. The file selector is something I have whined about enough times within the pages of *Palmtop*: mainly because it does nothing to help the beginner to grasp the all-important concepts of the 3a directory structure, and also because it offers little in the way of refinement. The inability to move a file from one place to another in a single operation is painful. Instead the file selector forces the user to first copy the file to the desired target location, then go back to the original file and delete it as a second operation.

Until now I have always preferred Purple Software's *'File Manager'* software as the fastest and most elegant replacement for the selector. Purple's file manager always had a good speed advantage over the competition because it was written in 'C', whereas all of the other shareware/freeware programs were done in the much slower OPL. *Filer* is also fast, and on reading through the supplied documentation I discovered that it is indeed also written in 'C'. I have never tried an earlier version of the program (this is version 2.1), but the documentation says that all versions prior to 2.0 were all coded in OPL.

On getting to grips with *Filer* I found the interface to be generally good. The program runs in around 50K of memory, so it is generally feasible to keep it running continuously—something

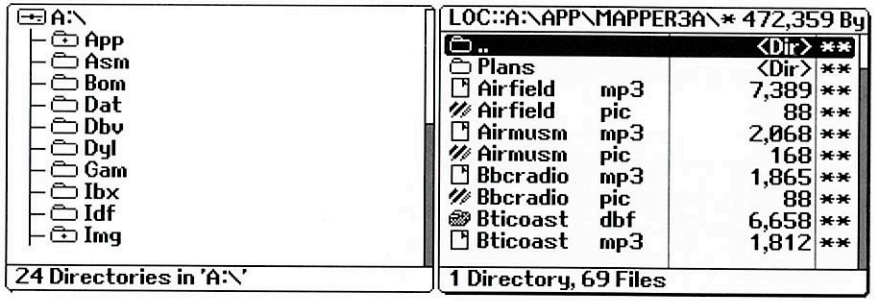


Lots of useful statistics—Filer's '*Drives*' screen

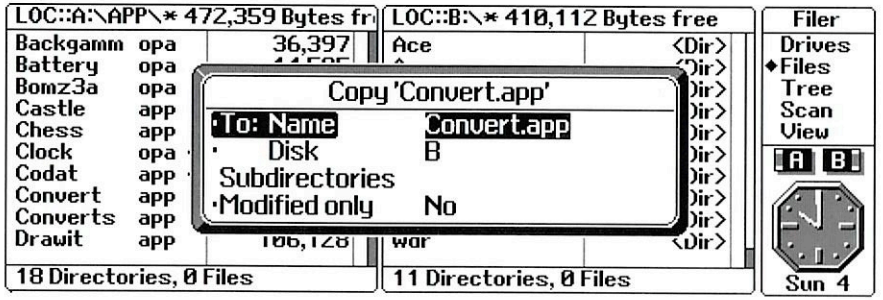
highly desirable in such an important utility—and the flexible setup screen even allows you to assign a hotkey to launch the program and to exit the program with a single press of the escape key.

All of the standard file management functions are present, including copy, move, rename, sort, tag, and change attributes, and the screens all give plenty of useful information telling you the size of directories and files, used and free space on drives, percent storage space occupied, drive types and so on.

The display can be set to show either one or two directories or file lists, and jumping between them requires only a press of the <tab> key. Files are tagged or untagged for copying, moving or deletion using the familiar <shift><enter> keystroke from the Psion file selector. Copying and moving operations will transfer from the currently highlighted file to either a manually enter path name, or to the directory currently highlighted in a second window (if such a window is open). Sadly, the 'copy' dialog window doesn't actually confirm the target location before you commit to the operation, and



Neat custom icons and scroll bars



Easy file copying, but no description of where it's going!

though *strictly* not a problem this is more than a little disconcerting at first.

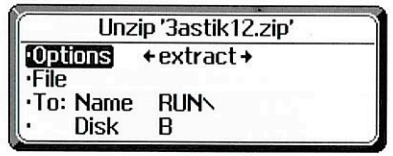
My other major area of complaint is that I could not persuade *Filer* to copy, move or delete multiple files. Tagging of the files I wanted to work on produced a neat tick mark next to each one, but then attempting the operation simply caused *Filer* to apply it to whatever single file was highlighted at the time, resolutely ignoring whatever combination had been previously tagged.

I spent a lot of time re-reading the documentation (which says that 'multi-file operations are possible') and trying different techniques, but nothing worked. Until this problem is fixed the program is severely limited, and cannot be recommended. This is a great shame, as otherwise it is a really excellent piece of software, and a lot of care and attention has obviously gone into the program's creation.

On the positive side everything else seems to work just fine, and two especially nice touches are that directory and file listings show tiny 'scroll bars' along the edge (see screen shot on previous page), and the little icons next to each file name are customised to show the kind of file type they represent.

Filer will also search through a selected drive or directories for specified filenames, and allows you to use 'wildcards' to help find what you need. Searching for specific text *within* files is also included, and is admirably fast.

To round off the software all windows have full font zooming just like the built-in Psion applications, and a useful hexadecimal editor and comprehensive program launcher are included too.



Easy unzipping with *Filer*

If you are forced to use your 3a to unzip compressed shareware then *Filer* has one other great feature, which is to automatically unzip files simply by pressing

the <Enter> key with the zip file highlighted. It is necessary to load the separate freeware UNZIP.IMG file into the /RUN/ directory of any drive first, but the rest is taken care of automatically.

In summary, *Filer* is excellent apart from the lack of multi-file operations, and with this corrected I expect it to become a serious contender. The Purple file manager still has a more elegant interface which is faster to use, and a few other refinements like automatic creation of directories when copying—but *Filer* has its own attractions too.

At $30US *Filer* is more expensive than the average shareware package, but it is also a particularly capable and polished program, and still compares favourably with commercial software prices.

With the inclusion of 'FILES' in the new 3c machines (see page 13) the market for third party file managers may eventually go the way of the dodo, but for the hundreds of thousands of existing 3a users *Filer* and its peers will continue to offer all the extra features left out of the Psion file selector.

Steve Clack

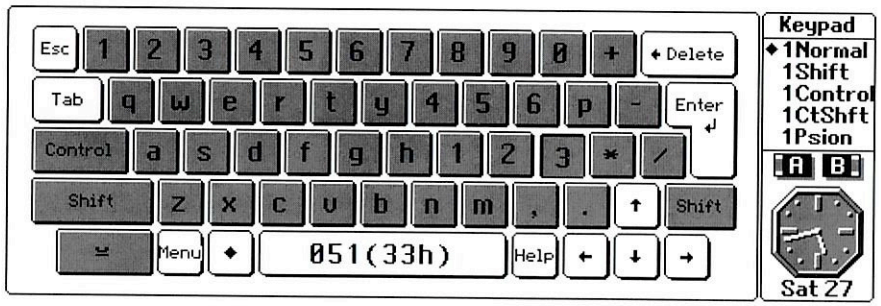
InfoBOX

FILER.ZIP (61K) is available from the usual shareware sources, and registration costs $30, or $35 on a floppy disk with printed manual.

KbdMap

Despite the odd title, *KbdMap* (actually meaning ***K**ey**b**oar**d** **Map**per*) is a very useful piece of shareware. Put into simple terms, the program allows you to redefine any of the 42 character keys on the 3a (or Series 3 or WorkAbout) keyboard to any other character of your choice.

The program comprises two main sections: the bit that allows you to edit the keystrokes to your own preferences and the bit that switches the program on and off (in case you want to temporarily disable it). *KbdMap* is entirely straightforward to operate and the keystrokes are changed by going into the editing program (see top of next page), first choosing the key that you want to change. This is done by traversing the 'virtual' keyboard on the screen with the arrow keys, and the selected letter then appears as though the key has been pressed in (the number '3', where the letter 'L' normally resides, on the screen shot). You can then type in the letter key you wish to change it to, or if you want to change to one of the special accented characters then just look up the code on page 246 of your Psion User Guide and type in the three letter code with the <Control> key pressed down. Therefore if you want the letter 'e' to appear as 'é', then just cursor across to the 'e' key and press and hold <Control> + <1><3><0>. Then choose 'Send to driver' from the *KbdMap* menu and the job is done.

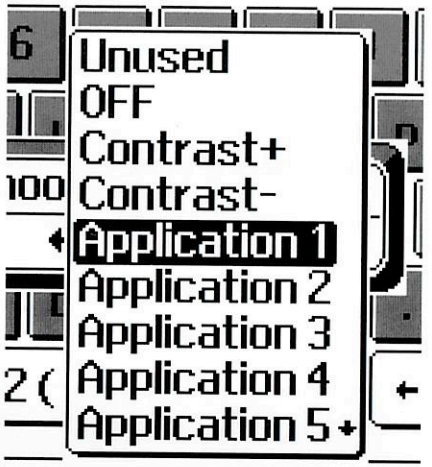


Just highlight the key you want to change, and enter the new keystroke

The software allows you to reassign the standard letter keys, plus all the same characters with the <Shift>, <Control>, <Shift><Control> and <Psion> modifiers pressed. This gives five lots of 42 keys, in other words 210 new characters—more than anyone could possibly remember!

You can toggle between TWO of these groups by pressing both <Shift> keys together, at which time the computer also bleeps at you to show that the special keyboard driver is loaded. Although you can assign another 210 keys to the second set many people will wish to reserve this for the standard character set.

The software is immensely useful for anyone who regularly works in more than one language (say English and French), and is also great for creating your own built-in numeric keypad (as I have done above) for easier entering of numbers. If you use two languages and have access to computers of both types then even allows you to load (and save) the keyboard mappings of, say a German 3a onto a Swedish one. This works by reading the settings from the machine's built-in ROM.



Assigning softkeys to your letter keys

A final useful feature of *KbdMap* is to enable any or all of the eight softkeys above the keyboard to be remapped to the regular keyboard, and also the screen contrast and the power OFF key. This is particularly useful if your softkey strip dies, as you can continue to switch

between all of the built-in programs without major inconvenience.

Overall, *KbdMap* is a great piece of software which works faultlessly in every respect and is a joy to use. The only downside is that the special driver occupies around 40K of RAM space while running, but if you make more than occasional use of special or accented keys then this is a small price to pay for the convenience it brings.

Steve Clack

InfoBOX

KBDMAP12.ZIP (22K) is available from the usual shareware sources, and registration costs £15, or $25US, 100FFR or 40DM.

For SALE

1Mb Flash SSD. Used once only to transfer data, no packaging - £80*.

Phone Toby Cooley on 01322 383929 (evenings only)

*** Will also swap for Chess game plus £30.**

Ranger disk floppy drive complete with Psion *3Link*, £120. Also Autoroute Express, £30. All in perfect condition with manuals.

Phone John Duxbury on 01767 313665

Sources for Finance Software...

BankPlus (BANKP20.ZIP, 32K), DPBank (DPBANK13.ZIP, 79K) and S3ABANK (S3ABANK8.ZIP, 256K) are all available as shareware from the usual sources.

Psion Money is available from all major Psion dealers.

Widget Finance Pack 3a is available directly from Widget Software:

tel: +44 (0)1438 815444 fax: +44 (0)1438 815222

Programmers' Workshop

by Leigh Edwards

The 'new boy' enters, looks around and smiles nervously.

Welcome to a new series of articles on programming, primarily in OPL (Organiser Programming Language) with very occasional forays into Operating System calls. In picking up the mantle for this column from Andrew Baldwin I was faced with a problem (apart from keeping up the excellent standards).

My dilemma was: At what level to pitch it? The beginner, expert, or at some vague middle ground? I didn't want to bore the experienced reader or baffle the beginner, but I could run the risk of doing both.

So my chosen approach will be as follows:

1. To assume that every reader has got access to an OPL programming manual as supplied by Psion, or at least the text of it, which is available in electronic form (see the references near the end of this article).
2. To assume that readers have read the main sections of the manual and have at least *some* experience of OPL.
3. To pick a key aspect of programming, then attempt to clarify and in particular extend the coverage provided in the manual, also referring to the manual where appropriate. Wherever possible I'll include illustrative code examples to demonstrate the concepts under discussion, and hopefully show new or useful aspects for problem solving.

I hope the majority of programmers will find something of interest and maybe something new in amongst my scribblings. Feedback on this column will be welcome, particularly on suggestions for future topics or questions about previous articles.

So, where shall we start?

In discussing fundamentals I feel that variables, constants, arguments (of the friendly function kind), parameters and use of memory are a good place to begin.

OPL only allows four types of variable: *Integers, long integers, floating point* and *strings* (see Chapter 2) which can be a little restrictive. In some languages such as C there are many more types, and you can even define names for new ones based on the standard types or combinations of them. Each type of variable uses a different amount of memory, and since OPL is translated instead of compiled like C, the variable names each take up memory too.

	bytes used
Integer	2
Long integer	4
Floating point	8
String(len)	len + 2

Variable names will consume as many bytes as the name length, up to a maximum name length of eight characters. The two extra bytes for strings hold the maximum length and the actual length of the string concerned, and they are stored in memory immediately before any characters within the string. For example:

```
PROC test:
    GLOBAL namestr$(12)
    namestr$ = "Palmtop"
ENDP
```

would use eight bytes for the string name and nine bytes for the string data. The maximum length byte would equal 12 and the actual length byte would equal 7. The memory containing the string would hold the decimal values: 12, 7, 80, 97, 108, 109, 116, 111 and 112. Since one byte can only hold values up to 255 this explains why OPL strings are limited to a maximum size of 255.

Array variables are slightly different

Numeric array variables have two bytes that store the number of elements in the array, i.e. its size, stored just before the values for each of the array items. So an integer array declared as: `GLOBAL myint%(20)` would take 42 bytes of memory.

String arrays are slightly different again

Again the first two bytes of memory hold the size of the array, i.e. the total number of strings, followed by a byte holding the maximum size that any string element could be. Each of the strings are then stored following the same pattern. The first byte holds the actual length of the string, followed by the characters in that string. Each string in the array follows on in the same way until the end of the array is reached.

Variables that are declared directly following each other occupy continuous memory, following the storage patterns outlined above. Using the `ADDR()` function it is possible to get the address at which a variable is stored in memory. You may be wondering by now how this information could be of value to you. Bear with me a little longer and all will become clear.

Good programming practice

Almost any program of reasonable size and complexity should be split into Procedures that are 'called' as required. This approach has many benefits, including:

1. Splitting a complex problem down into small manageable chunks, each of which can be written and tested individually.
2. Sections of code can be made general purpose, avoiding duplication of similar code.
3. Procedures from one program can easily be re-used in others with similar needs.

When a procedure is used a number of parameters are included in the calling statement. It is the variability of the parameters which allows the procedure to be made general purpose. For example you might have a procedure that calculates the sale price of an item based on the trade value, profit margin and tax rate. You would pass the values in as parameters and the procedure would return the selling price. But what if you want the procedure to return the sale price, the tax amount and the amount of profit? The usual solution in OPL is to use global variables for the other

two return values, but this approach can have a number of disadvantages:

1. Global variables are visible and modifiable outside of the procedures in which they are normally used. This can lead to bugs which are difficult to find.
2. They hold their value between procedure calls and a previous value may be used inappropriately.
3. They make procedures less general because they rely on variables which must be declared outside of themselves.
4. Each additional *global* takes more memory and may slow programs down.

Some of the disadvantages can be reduced by declaring globals as near to their point of reference as possible. For example, if a global is declared in the very first procedure of a program then all other parts of the program can see and modify it. If it is declared inside a lower level procedure instead, then only that procedure or any others that are called by it can see the variable (including any other procedures that they may call, and so on down). Hiding essential globals in this way can save a lot of anguish and head scratching later.

Some value at last

Here's an alternative approach to using globals for passing back multiple values from a procedure by combining the `ADDR()` function with the appropriate `POKE` command. To take up my previous example of sale price calculation again:

```
PROC price:
    LOCAL tradep,taxrate,markup
    LOCAL custp,profit,taxamnt
    taxrate = .175 REM tax rate may vary depending on product
    markup = .2    REM profit margin varies depending on product
    PRINT "Trade price ?", REM ask for the trade price
    INPUT tradep          REM get trade price from salesperson
    REM call salesp: to return the customers price
    REM and pass the memory addresses of the taxamnt and
    REM profit local variables so salesp: can pass values back
    custp =
salesp:(tradep,markup,taxrate,ADDR(taxamnt),ADDR(profit))
    PRINT "Customer price",custp REM show the results
```



```
    PRINT "Sales tax",taxamnt
    PRINT "Profit",profit
    GET
    RETURN 0
ENDP

PROC salesp:(tp,mu,txr,txadd%,prftadd%)
    REM txadd% and prftadd% are integer values which hold the
    REM addresses of the floating point variables to be modified
    POKEF prftadd%,tp*mu          REM poke in the value of profit
    POKEF txadd%,(tp*(1+mu))*txr REM poke in value of sales tax
    RETURN (tp*(1+mu))*(1+txr)    REM return the customer price
ENDP
```

To use variable types other than floating point you will obviously have to substitute the appropriate `POKE` command (see Chapter 13) for the ones in the example.

More problems solved

You cannot pass an array as a parameter to a procedure, but using this approach you can pass the address of the first element of the array and access its elements using the corresponding `PEEK` and `POKE` commands. For example an integer array `a%(12)` `ADDR(a%())` will return the address of the first element and `ADDR(a%(12))` will give the address of the last element. You can use `PEEKW(ADDR(a%(9))` to read the integer value in the 9th element and `POKEW(ADDR(a%(9)),200` to store the integer value 200 in the 9th element of array `a%()`. Easy when you know how, isn't it?

Ever wished you could use byte variables instead of integers? You can declare a long string or an array of integers, find its address using `ADDR()` and then use the `PEEKB` and `POKEB` to access the individual bytes. Note, if you use a string `PEEKB(ADDR(str$))` will return the length byte of the string. You need to use `PEEKB(ADDR(str$)+1)` to get the first byte of the string. If you're keeping track of array element addresses by incrementing or decrementing the value you should use the `UADD` and `USUB` functions (only on the 3a) to avoid integer overflow errors.

Similarly if you really need a string longer than 255 bytes, you can declare a big integer array.

Next time I'll delve further into memory and explore a substitute DATA statement found in the BASIC language. But one last word on numeric variables and program size and speed: always use integer variables unless you're likely to go out of range (see Chapter 2), then choose a long integer, and *only* use floating point variables where necessary. Run the following bit of code, note the number of seconds and then add on an '&' character to all occurrences of the 'ctr' variable. Translate and run it, note the seconds again then replace the '&' with '%' and try again.

```
PROC loops:
    LOCAL ctr
    LOCAL tim1&,tim2&
    PRINT "looping"
    tim1& = int(hour)*3600+minute*60+second
    WHILE ctr < 10000
    ctr = ctr + 1
    ENDWH
    tim2& = int(hour)*3600+minute*60+second
    PRINT tim2&-tim1&,"seconds"
    GET
    RETURN 0
ENDP
```

References:

All chapter numbers refer to the OPL Programming manual available from Psion. The text of the manual and OPL examples can be obtained online as **oplman.zip** from a number of sources, including:

CIX - Psion conference, files topic, in the flist.

Compuserve Palmtop forum, Psion programming library 19.

From ftp://ftp.nwt.com/FTP/S3a/Developer/OPL/

Or for online viewing at
http://www.primate.wisc.edu/people/dubois/psion/oplman/psion.html

The author can be contacted via e-mail using *ple@cix.compulink.co.uk* or *100533.1726@compuserve.com*, or via *Palmtop*.

Banking on your Psion

Our long-awaited look at the numerous capable personal finance tracking packages for the Series 3a

by Steve Clack

There can be few types of software more naturally suited to palmtop computers in general than personal finance or 'bank account manager' programs. Keeping your transactions up-to-date on a deskbound computer was always a tedious business, requiring that you run off and boot up the computer and load the necessary software before entering just a single transaction. This generally has the effect of forcing users to wait until they have accumulated several transactions, then entering them all at a single sitting.

This is where the rot sets in. Waiting a few days is usually enough to ensure that something gets forgotten, and an incomplete transaction record quickly becomes little more than useless. This is where palmtop computers come to the rescue (especially multi-tasking ones like the 3a). The moment the financial transaction occurs you can simply whip out your computer, switch on, press a few keys to select your banking software, then enter the full event details and stuff your 3a back into your pocket, bag, briefcase or whatever.

The ease and immediacy of the whole process encourages even the worst procrastinator to enter every item as soon as it happens, and thus reduces the risk of holes appearing in the transaction list. Perfect.

The even better news is that the combined range of shareware and commercial finance tracking applications for the 3a are diverse enough to cover almost everyone's needs, no matter how simple or complex your

banking requirements or how modest your software budget.

So, what do they do?

In terms of their function, finance packages for the 3a offer largely similar features to any full-sized computer-based programs, but are obviously less sophisticated in their implementation.

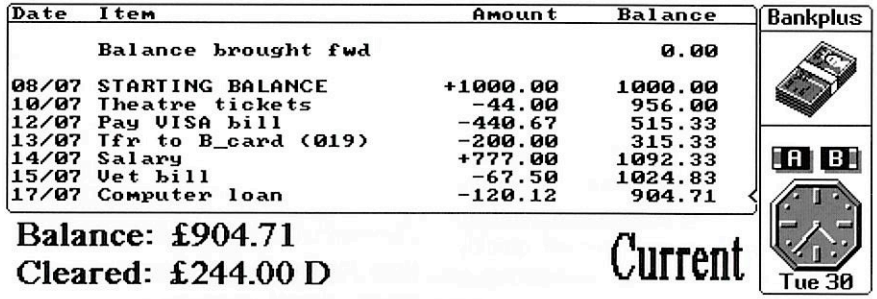
They all allow multiple bank accounts or categories so that you can keep track of current (cheque) accounts, savings accounts and several credit cards. They can automatically deduct standing orders from your account on the appropriate day, and transfer funds between different accounts. The most ambitious of them also offer graphical plots of your bank balance, multiple currencies, compatibility with desktop finance packages (notably *Quicken*), and a whole host of other features.

Updated versions of *BankPlus*, *DPBank*, *S3abank* and the *Widget Finance Pack* have all appeared in the past month or so, so now's a great time to take a look at all of these plus Psion's own *Money* program:

BankPlus

Written by Pete Sipple (yes, *our* Pete Sipple) as shareware. *BankPlus*, together with *DPBank*, represents the most minimalist approach to banking software. Installation is simplicity itself, comprising only three files all to be dumped directly into the /APP/ directory of any drive. The entire program with online help takes less than 50K of storage space, and less than 40K of RAM when running.

Initial setup is simple, and allows the user to define up to eight separate named accounts (such as 'current', 'savings', 'business', etc.) The simplicity of the program means that it takes only ten minutes or so to get to grips with, which will appeal to the average user with non-complicated accounting needs.



***BankPlus*—perhaps not the most stylish interface, but certainly the easiest to use**

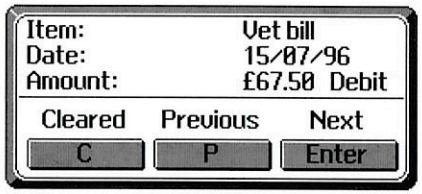
CATEGORY	No.	TOTAL
Computer	0	0.00
Personal	1	44.00
Household	1	67.50
Clothing	0	0.00

Current: 30/06/96 to 30/07/96

D - Change Date Range
X - Exit

Viewing totals by category

Don't expect lots of frills and flexibility from *BankPlus*—it is clearly designed with modest requirements in mind. Basic operation is entirely straightforward though, and access to each account is done from a separate dedicated menu, or by entering the first letter of the account name. Monthly standing orders are handled, and you can specify any months you wish to skip.



Reconciling your transactions

Transactions can easily be reconciled against your printed statements by searching for the text of each transaction, and statements can be printed for any period you choose.

The small size of *BankPlus* necessarily means that many of the more esoteric functions of the other packages are absent from this program, and I certainly missed the ability to see a graphical representation of my current financial status. The inability to archive old transactions may be awkward for some, although they can be exported as a simple text file for further manipulation in another program, or dumped into the PC-based *Quicken* package. *Bankplus'* ability to categorise transactions with special codes is useful for budgeting purposes, but it doesn't show these in any of the transaction views, which is a pity. The option to export the data to the 3a spreadsheet would also have been a nice feature, though of course all these things would compromise *BankPlus'* small size and convenience to some extent.

The minimal memory requirements of *BankPlus* are a large part of its attraction, and for many users the complexity of the larger programs may just be unnecessary baggage. If you are looking for an easy-to-use package with minimal memory requirements then *BankPlus* may fit the bill nicely.

DPBank

Written by Daniel Pfund in Switzerland, this shareware program falls into a similar category to *BankPlus*, but offers a little more sophistication, and thus takes a little longer to learn. It still comes a close second in terms of ease-of-use though, and with similar memory requirements to *BankPlus* (50K disk space, 30K working memory) it has the same attraction for those with generally limited resources or 256K machines.

One of the most useful additional features over *BankPlus* is the option of

Current | Personal | Savings | Business

Date	Cat	Description	Amount in £	Balance	
01/07		Opening balance	500.00	500.00	✓
08/07		Interest payment	12.66	512.66	
30/07	C	Computer upgrade [Cheque 100555]	-444.29	68.37	
03/08	C	Office supplies	-111.42	-43.05	
05/08	P	New stationery	-92.47	-135.52	
05/08	C	Training [Cheque 100558]	-225.90	-361.42	
07/08	H	Sales	421.92	60.50	
10/08	C	DTP Software [Cheque 100556]	-555.12	-494.62	
10/08		Insurance premium [Cheque 100557]	-234.56	-729.18	
12/08	C	SO:Printer	-123.45	-852.63	

Up to six accounts, with neat tabs for each one

auto cheque numbering. This is achieved by entering your current cheque number when an account is set up, after which *DPBank* automatically

Enter payment details
·Payment mode ◆Cheque◆
·Cheque number 100555

Auto cheque numbering

increments the number by one whenever you define a transaction as being made by cheque.

Another time-saver when entering transactions is *DPBank*'s ability to accept pre-defined transaction types. This means that instead of having to type in descriptions such as 'Cashpoint withdrawal', 'Dentist bill' and so on every time you enter a transaction, you can pre-define all the items you use regularly and select their names from a pick-list on screen.

DPBank is particularly strong on both multiple currency transactions and foreign language support. It currently supports both UK and US English (*Cheques* and *checks*), and can show menus and help files in English, French and Norwegian, with German due to be added at the next release.

Current | Personal | Savings | Business

Date	10 transactions	Debit	Credit	Total	nce	
01/0	Reconciled	1,345.39	921.92	-423.47	.00	✓
08/0					.66	
30/0	Not reconciled	441.82	12.66	-429.16	.37	✓
03/0					05	✓
05/0	Total	1,787.21	934.58	-852.63	52	
05/0					42	
07/0	Crossed-out (not yet)	0.00	0.00	0.00	.50	✓
10/0	Grand total	1,787.21	934.58	-852.63	62	✓
10/0					18	✓
12/08	C SO:Printer			-123.45	-852.63	

A transaction summary screen for an overview of your finances

Current — Initial Balance : 543.89

Date	Description	Reference	Debit	Credit	Balance
31 Jul 96	Vet bill	H	46.87		497.02
01 Aug 96	Gas bill	H	88.19		408.83
03 Aug 96	Paid in	S		345.67	754.50
05 Aug 96	Software	C	33.98		720.52
05 Dec 96	Pay VISA bill	V	122.66		597.86

Currency : £

S3ABANK's transaction screen

Archiving of old transactions is possible within *DPBank*, and you can create multiple files for archived periods. File import is not supported (as with *BankPlus*), but data can be exported as raw text, *Quicken* files or as Psion DATA files.

In common with *BankPlus*, *DPBank* offers no font zooming, no graphing and no advanced features such as expense tracking, home inventory, etc.

Overall, *DPBank* is a very capable program with an excellent mix of simplicity and power. The time-saving features of auto cheque numbering and auto transaction names help to speed up the data entry process and thus make it less tedious to keep all of your accounts up-to-date. Its biggest limitation is the six account maximum, which can soon be used up if you have a couple of bank accounts and several credit cards (each of which represent a single account).

S3ABANK

At the other end of the shareware scale we have *S3ABANK*. If you can think of a feature you'd expect in a finance package then *S3ABANK* probably has it. A goliath of a program with support for up to 20 accounts, you are most unlikely to outgrow this one. In addition to the main program *S3ABANK* is also supplied with optional modules for maintaining a home inventory, monitoring the fuel consumption of up to ten vehicles, a financial planner to estimate your future expenditures, an investment tracking module to monitor the value and history of a small share portfolio, and a utility tracker to keep tabs on metered utilities such as gas, water and electricity. In short, *S3ABANK* can look after all aspects of your finances, not just the ones related directly to your bank accounts.

All of these goodies come at a price though, with a full installation including all optional modules and optional help files taking up more than 350K of storage space, and the program taking

Adding items to your home inventory—up to 10 houses worth!

more than 100K of working memory while running.

The complexity of *S3ABANK* makes it a little daunting for the beginner as there are simply so many menu options and dialog boxes, though a lot of the additional features can simply be ignored if you don't need them.

Lots of advanced features...

Advanced functions within the basic finance package include auto numbering of cheques and any other transactions you wish to assign a serial number to: such as shareware registrations, magazine subscriptions, etc. Common transaction names can be set up for instant access as with *DPBank*, and numerous other extras such as deferring of transactions and attaching warning flags to remind you of special transactions are catered for. You can even attach memos to your transactions to remind you of any important features.

The 3a's diamond key is used to move sequentially between the main bank accounts screen, separate account and standing order summary screens plus overview screens for all the optional modules you have loaded, such as the the budget planner, share listing, home inventory, etc.

The only obvious omission from *S3ABANK* is the ability to plot a graph of your balances. I do feel that this is a really desirable feature for such an otherwise comprehensive program, and this is the only major area where *S3ABANK* falls behind the two commercial packages by Psion and Widget Software.

Data transfer between other packages is very well catered for in *S3ABANK*, with both export *and* import from *Quicken*, and saving to either ASCII text or *Comma Separated Variable* text, which can be used to dump the data into external spreadsheets or databases.

S3ABANK is an extremely powerful, flexible and sophisticated piece of software, and if you need this much power then the *S3ABANK* suite represents excellent value for money. If your needs are quite simple however, the additional complexity and memory requirements may make one of the simpler packages a more suitable alternative.

Incidentally, if you don't need a finance package but are interested in any of the add-in modules, they are all available separately (see the advertisement on page 101).

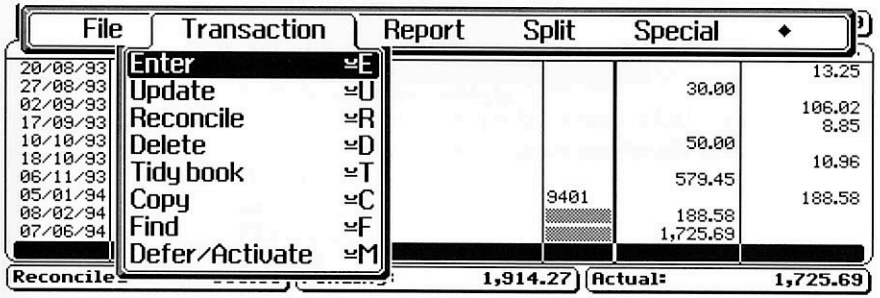
Psion Money

Without the bolt-on modules of *S3ABANK*, Psion Money is an otherwise quite comprehensive package. The interface is perhaps a little more refined than that of *S3ABANK*, and the addition of zoomable fonts tend to make the transaction displays more pleasant to use.

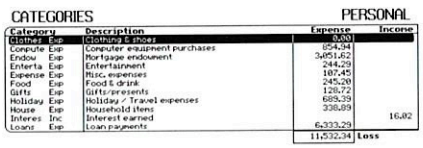
Money uses the *double-entry* method of bookkeeping, which is generally used by businesses rather than domestic users. This and the use of terms such as 'asset' and 'liability' make the whole package a little clumsy for the non-accountant to master, and may be overly daunting for the domestic user with just a couple of accounts to keep in order.

For the small business user however, *Money* offers the ability to split transactions between more than one category and neatly apportion a VAT component to desired items. As you would expect from Psion the user interface is very polished, using the diamond key to move between the main screens in the same way as *S3ABANK*.

Reporting features within *Money* are excellent, with graphing of account balances over any period, plotting of



Money—a nice zoomable transaction screen


CATEGORIES
PERSONAL
Category Description Expense Income
Clothes Exp Clothing & shoes 0.00
Compute Exp Computer equipment purchases 654.94
Endow Exp Mortgage endowment 3,051.62
Enterta Exp Entertainment 244.29
Expense Exp Misc. expenses 107.45
Food Exp Food & drink 245.20
Gifts Exp Gifts/presents 128.72
Holiday Exp Holiday / Travel expenses 685.39
House Exp Household items 338.89
Interes Inc Interest earned 16.82
Loans Exp Loan payments 6,333.29
11,532.34 Loss

Summarising expenses by category

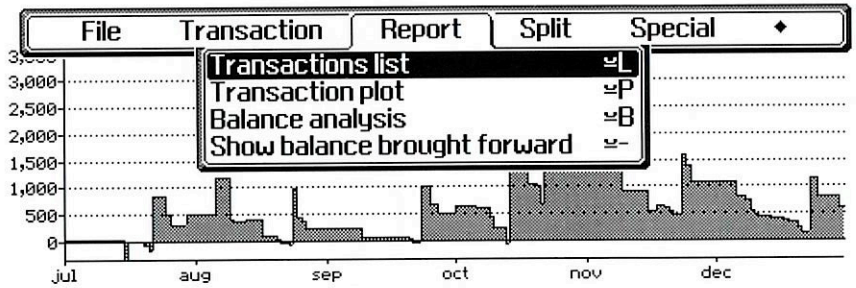
your 'net worth' over given dates and the output of attractive transaction summary lists to either screen or printer.

On the negative side, the program frustratingly refuses to save date range values for the graphs and reports, always defaulting to the year 2099 as the last transaction date whenever the program is exited and restarted. The memory requirements are similar to *S3ABANK*, so leaving the program running to prevent this resetting requires a painful use of your memory resources.

Actual program size (as opposed to working memory) is remarkably modest for a program of this depth, and comprises a single 80K file. Speed is really excellent, and makes S3ABANK look somewhat slow at times.

The manual claims that data can be exported to ASCII (text) files, Lotus WKS/WK1 spreadsheet format, and Series 3a spreadsheet and word processor documents, though all but the ASCII export will only work on certain report types, such as 'net worth' plots. Export to *Quicken* is also provided, but with no import facility.

Otherwise offering very similar capabilities to *S3ABANK*, *Money* is perhaps more suited to the business user than to domestic accounts. The inclusion of



Attractive and easy-to-interpret transaction plots

Money also lacks auto cheque numbering and automatic transaction descriptions, which I believe should be taken for granted on a package at this price. The lack of these really slow down entry of data and unnecessarily mar the program's efficiency.

'profit and loss reports' and its comprehensive reporting make *Money* particularly suitable for business accounts, together with the well-integrated provision for VAT accounting.

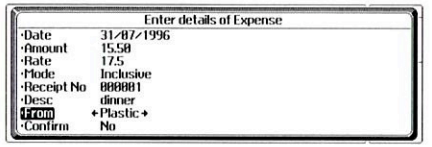
Finance Pack 3a

The latest version of Widget Software's *Finance Pack 3a* boasts perhaps the most configurable and flexible of all the packages reviewed. This doesn't extend to the provision of the excellent add-in home inventory, share tracking and other useful peripheral programs included with *S3ABANK*, but as a pure bank account management program *FP3A* has much to commend it.

A capacity for up to 60 accounts is almost certainly more than anyone would ever require, but it serves to show that this program is designed with the 'power user' in mind, and that it really doesn't lack functionality in any area.

If you incur separate business expenses-that you wish to keep track of then *FP3A* is ideal. It will allow you to enter all items from the separate 'Expenses' menu and and then reclaim and print expense reports with ease.

As with Psion *Money*, reporting is extremely strong with *FP3A* , but *FP3A* offers more report types, more graph types and more overall flexibility in every respect. The reporting capabilities could fill a sizeable article in themselves, but suffice to say that the options are more than adequate for all but the most esoteric of requirements.

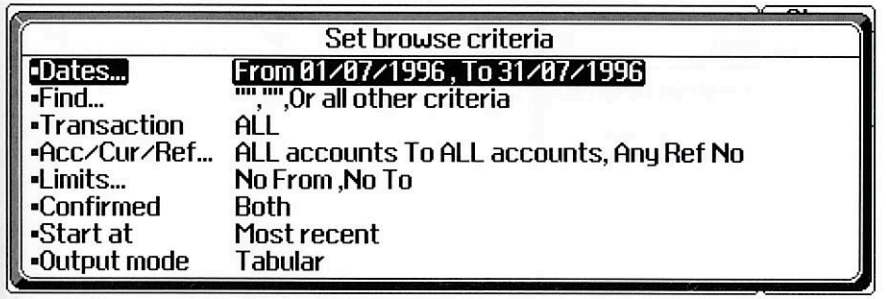


Entering expenses

Memory requirement is exceptionally low at something a little over 50K while running, but at over 300K the storage requirements are almost as high as *S3ABANK*. The program is supplied on an SSD, so can be run directly from that if you have slot free, or from your own SSD if you prefer.

Comprehensive export to *Quicken* is supported, but no other import or export formats.

Overall, *FP3A* is a capable piece of software that includes every feature most domestic users are ever likely to need.


Set browse criteria
•Dates... From 01/07/1996, To 31/07/1996
•Find... "","",Or all other criteria
•Transaction ALL
•Acc/Cur/Ref... ALL accounts To ALL accounts, Any Ref No
•Limits... No From ,No To
•Confirmed Both
•Start at Most recent
•Output mode Tabular

One of *Finance Pack 3a*'s many configurable screens

PERSONAL FINANCE PROGRAMS

See page 42 for availability of software	BankPlus	DPBank	S3ABANK	Psion Money	Finance Pack 3a
Maximum number of accounts	8	6	20	>10	60
Automated entry of standing orders	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Transfer funds between different accounts	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Automatic numbering of cheques	✘	✔	✔	✘	✔
Auto-entry of predefined transaction names	✘	✔	✔	✘	✔
Classification of expense categories	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Statement output to printer	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Support for multiple currencies	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Graphical plots of account balances	✘	✘	✘	✔	✔
Archiving of old transactions	✘	✔	✔	✔	✔
Export of transactions to *Quicken*	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Import of transactions from *Quicken*	✘	✘	✔	✘	✘
Version number	2.0	1.3	1.8	-	5
Price	£8	£10	£20	£49.95 inc VAT	£59.95 inc VAT

Working with WORD

By Steve Clack

The third part of our series to help the relative beginner get to grips with the Series 3a's built-in programs.

We continue with the third instalment devoted to the 3a's powerful word processor...

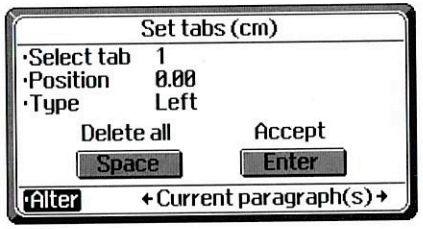
The last issue started our sample document by explaining how to create, name and save a new word processor file, doing some initial preparation and setup work, and entering the addressee's details at the top of the page. In this issue we'll continue with the document and talk about some more formatting options.

The last instalment left us with a saved document with a centred address at the top of the page, so let's pick up that document and continue where we left off. This is done by highlighting the name of the file under the word processor icon on your system screen, and pressing the <Enter> key to open it.

Centering the sender's address across the page is one formatting option, but another popular technique is to keep everything left-aligned, but moved across to the right side of the page. It is of course possible to simply choose 'Right' from the alignment menu, but this tends to look untidy and unprofessional when applied to address information.

So, let's use the 'Tab' commands to neatly move the whole address across to the right, and then save this format as a reusable 'style'. Firstly, set the paragraph alignment from 'Centred' back to 'Left', and with the flashing cursor positioned somewhere within the block of address text, select 'Tabs' from the 'Paragraphs' menu, which will show default positions

for up to eight tab marks across the page. As we only need a single tab for this section of the document you can delete all the previously set marks by first checking that the line at the bottom of the 'Set tabs' dialog box is set to 'Current paragraphs', then pressing the space bar to delete all the tabs.



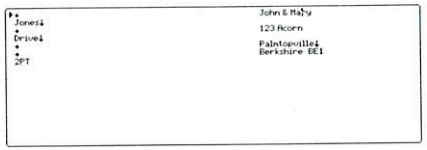
Delete all the tab marks

With all the old tabs cleared you can then enter a suitable setting for the new one, bearing in mind that Word will not show the tab settings correctly on screen, because the 3a screen width is entirely different to the paper width when the document is printed. This means that a little trial-and-error is needed to get things looking perfect, so here's the procedure:

- First move the cursor in the 'Set tabs' dialog box down to the 'Position' line, and enter a trial value of 12.00cm, leave the 'Type' set to 'Left', then hit the <Enter> key to accept the value you typed in.
- Next you have to move the text across the page to the 12cm tab setting by going to the beginning of each line of the address text and pressing the <Tab> key once. Provided that you still have the 'Show tabs' option set to 'Yes' in the preferences menu then little right-pointing arrows will appear to the left of each line to show that the tab key has been pressed.

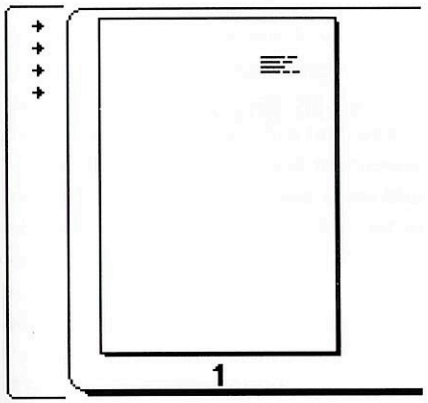
Each line tabbed...

To see the effect the tab settings will have you can select 'Use printer layout' from the 'Word' menu, which will move the lines across the page to simulate their 12cm jump to the right. It is important to note that you may not be able to see the full text width on screen when using this mode, so you should use the 'Zoom in' function from the 'Special' menu to squeeze the full page width onto the little 3a screen.



Uh oh, wrong setting!

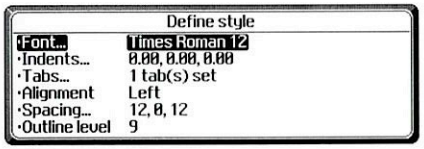
- With the address text I have entered you can see that 12cm was too big a tab, causing some of the lines to 'wrap' across to the next one. The solution is to go back into the 'Tabs' menu option and set the value to something a little lower, in this case 11cm. An alternative way to check that the lines don't spill over is to use the 'Print preview' from the 'Special' menu to view a little thumbnail picture of the entire page. The screen shot below shows that the text is now neatly moved across to the right side of the page, but the tidy left-justification of the text is still preserved by the tab marks.



A tiny 'map' of your document

Once you are happy with the positioning of your heading we will save this style for future use. To do this we should first go back to the 'Word' menu and select 'Use screen layout'. Although some people may prefer the 'Use printer layout' option most users find the unpredictable left-to-right scrolling of the text disconcerting. By using the 'Use screen layout' option you can always be sure that you are viewing the whole text of every line on screen, at the same time bearing in mind that some of the line endings and tab marks will not match the final printed document.

The first stage in saving a given set of paragraph attributes as a reusable 'style' is to make sure the flashing cursor is positioned somewhere over the text you wish to copy the style from—in this case the address—and then select the 'Style housekeeping' option from the 'Styles' menu and hit 'Define' to add the new style to your document. This brings up the 'Define style' dialog box which allows you to fine tune all text attributes before saving it.



Pressing the <Tab> key while on the 'Font' option brings up a secondary dialog box giving numerous specific font style settings such as bold, underline, font size, etc. For the sake of this exercise let's go to the 'Bold' option here and use the left or right arrow key to toggle the setting to 'On'. We'll leave the font type and other settings as they are for now, so press the <Enter> key to accept the bold text setting and go back to the 'Define style' box.

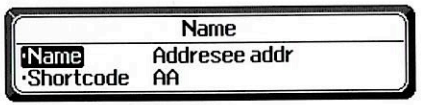
The next option down, 'Indents', has a rather similar function to the 'Tab' option, and in fact would have been a very good way to set up the address layout, but we'll be using indents later

on in the document, so this was a good opportunity to show how tabs work.

The 'Tabs' line confirms that we have a single tab set for this paragraph, and a press of the <Tab> key from here will confirm and allow you to change the settings in exactly the same way as we did from the 'Tabs' option in the paragraph menu.

The 'Alignment' line shows us that the text is still aligned left, and we'll ignore the bottom two lines for now, as we'll be covering them in a later instalment.

To accept all these settings press the <Enter> key once. This brings up another box allowing you to assign a meaningful name to the style, and a shortcode that you can use to quickly access the style at any point with a few keystrokes. From this 'Name' box enter something descriptive like 'Addressee addr' on the 'Name' line and 'AA' (for **A**ddressee **a**ddress) in the shortcode. Note that you can use no more than 15 characters for the name, only two letter codes for the shortcode, and you cannot use the same name or code as any style name that may be already assigned. More of that later.

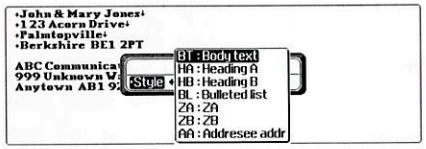


Name that style

As soon as you then press the <Enter> key the 'AA' style is saved with all your settings for the selected paragraph, and you will be returned to the document on screen with the entire address now changed to bold text as you requested.

Before we start entering the body of the text we should enter the recipient's address, which is normally justified to the left of the page just below the sender's address. To do this move the cursor to the end of the addressee details and press the <Enter> key to create a one line gap from the last paragraph. Then enter the entire recipient address as a single paragraph, pressing <Shift><Enter> instead of <Enter> to keep all the lines grouped together as before. You will notice that all of the text appears in bold, as by default this new address is assumed to be a continuation of the 'AA' paragraph style. To override this and revert the style back to the normal paragraph style you can once again select 'Style housekeeping' from the 'Style' menu, and choose the 'Apply' option from the list. Then choose 'BT :Body text' from the available styles and the second address will instantly revert to the standard 'BT' style. You can get the same effect much more quickly by just holding down the <Control> key and pressing <B><T> in sequence.

In the next issue we'll complete the letter text, and print out the result.



Programmers' Surgery

The continuation of our regular feature in which Rick ("The Doc") Andrews addresses your programming questions and woes...

dHelp dWith dDialog

I have some simple questions about programming that I can not find the answers for in the manual. Can you help?

1. How can you get numerical or text results displayed in a dialog box? I want them to be displayed as the result of the program, not as a field for the user to alter as when inputting data into the program.
2. When displaying a numerical result in a program (such as above), how do you get the answer to be displayed to a pre-defined number of decimal places - i.e an answer displayed in a financial format?"

Jonathan Thomas
Maidstone, Kent

Well Jonathan, to answer your first question, there are several OPL dialog commands to display textual information in a dialog box. To start with, you can use `dINIT` for short pieces of information. This initialises a dialog, and can provide a

title for the dialog box, but it can also be used on its own as a complete dialog:

```
REM dINIT optional title$
dINIT "You were born on a " + nameday$
DIALOG
```

which shows the text, underlined and in a one line dialog box, like this:

It looks a bit messy and you probably wouldn't use it for dialogs that get seen every day, but it could be useful for reporting unexpected errors and stuff.

For displaying more information, you can use the dTEXT command which displays a prompt and body text string in a default style. You can change the style by giving a third argument.

In this example, I have chosen to initialise the dialog with no title, but have used the first text line to give a different type of title by changing the style of the text to bold [$100], underlined [$200] and centrally aligned [2]. The values are simply added to give the style argument $302. (By the way, the dollar sign means these numbers are hexadecimal). Many people prefer to see dialogs that look like the ones used in the Psion's built-in applications, but this gives an example of what you can achieve in your own programs.

```
dINIT
REM dTEXT prompt$, body$, optional style%
dTEXT "", "Your timber order", $302
dTEXT "Type:", timtype$
dTEXT "Location:", locat$
DIALOG
```

which creates this dialog:

That's all very well for textual information, but what about your numerical results? The secret is to convert the numbers into a text string and display the string. Use one of the string commands like GEN$, which creates a string based on the value. And remember that lists of numbers look neater if they are aligned to the right, so dTEXT has a style value of 1.


```
REM GEN$(value, string_length)
unit$ = GEN$( unit%,5 )
outer$ = GEN$( outer%,5 )
dINIT "Quantity"
dTEXT "Outer:", outer$, 1
dTEXT "Unit:", unit$, 1
DIALOG
```

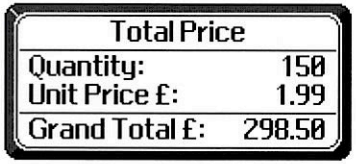
which looks like this:

To answer your second question: in order to display a numeric result aligned to a pre-defined number of decimal places, make sure that the string being built from the numerical result is aligned to your requirements when you create it. Use FIX$ which builds a string based on the value, the number of decimal places you want, and the string length. For example: to format a number to two decimal places, use FIX$(value,2,6) which creates a six character string whose last three characters will be the decimal point and two decimal digits.

To separate the total from the other figures, the dTEXT line for Unit Price is underlined [$200].

```
REM FIX$( value, decimal places, length )
dINIT "Total Price"
dTEXT "Quantity:", GEN$( quan%,5 ), 1
dTEXT "Unit Price £:", FIX$( price, 2, 6 ), $201
dTEXT "Grand Total £:", FIX$( total, 2, 6 ), 1
DIALOG
```

which looks like:



Incidentally - the entry for dTEXT in the 3a Programming Manual says "Only one line can be drawn across a dialog" which, as you can see, is one of the very few places where the manual is wrong! For more information about dialogs, refer to the

manual on pages 67-72, and for string generation and formatting commands, see the individual entries in Section 13 - Alphabetic listing.

Speaking of the manual: it must be time to mention the starting point of your Psion programming journey: the Psion Series 3a Programming Manual. It is available from Psion (tel: +44 (0) 990 143050) priced £9.95 and is highly recommended, even with the little errors!

Rick Andrews

London meeting

Those within travelling distance of London may wish to know that a meeting has been arranged by Rick Andrews:

Date: Monday 23rd September '96
Time: 7pm onwards
Place: The Albion Pub, 2-3 New Bridge Street, London EC4

We will have exclusive use of the function room upstairs (which is air-conditioned), and it has its own bar and seats around 45 people. Food will be available until 9pm.

Please e-mail Rick Andrews (rick@cix.compulink.co.uk) if you plan to attend, or you can contact *Palmtop* for more details.

Do you want to get together?

Following the article on page 75 of the last issue of *Palmtop*, we are now getting feedback from readers who want to get together for informal meetings with Psion users in their area.

If you live within the following areas and would like to attend such meetings then please contact the *Palmtop* readers given below:

Maidstone, Kent, ENGLAND

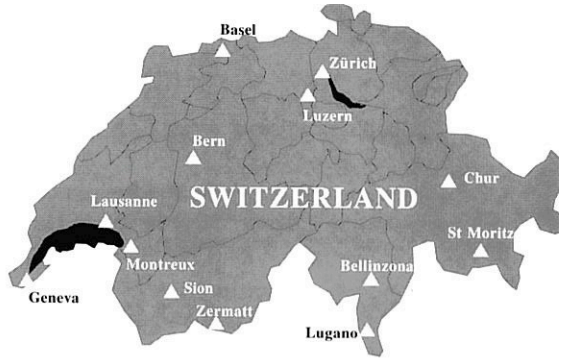
Contact: Mr Mark Wood
tel: (01622) 727777

Carmel, NY, USA

Mike Schneider
tel: (914) 433 4416

If you want to get together with fellow Psion enthusiasts in *your* area then please contact *Palmtop* so that we can include you in future editions of this list. We cannot give out personal details of other subscribers, but we can at least tell you how many other readers live in your part of the world and post your details here for everyone to read!

Psion Around The World



The fifth short piece looking at Psion-related groups and services examines PSILOG, the Psion User Group of Switzerland

PSILOG was founded as a special service of Swiss management magazine 'Der Organisator' (i.e. The Organizer). It is managed by Patricia Schnyder, daughter of the editor of 'Der Organisator'. PSILOG provides several services for its members:

- Free subscription to 'Der Organisator' (11 issues a year, every issue with at least one PSILOG page with hints and information about the latest Psion products).
- Subscription to *PSILOGazette* (3 or 4 issues a year), the club members' magazine.
- Club meetings (every 2nd Tuesday of the month) in Zurich (at SECOM's PSION Center, Stauffacherstrasse 35, 8004 Zurich, Tel. +41 (0)1 2428441)

- *PSILOGate*, the BBS for members which is now being transferred to *PSILONet* on the internet (*http://www.village.ch/psilonet*)
- At least one big gathering every year, where demonstrations and a users' training course take place.
- Special deals on all PSION products (10-15% off normal retail price).

The club co-operates with *EXCOM*, the Swiss general importer of all Psion products, so the latest products can be made quickly available. Membership fee is Sfr. 150 per year, all inclusive.

Christian Bretscher of *PSILOG* says "The club's most interesting service is probably the monthly meeting, which allows users to exchange shareware and freeware as well as hints and tricks concerning all

aspects of Psion usage. One much-appreciated characteristic of this meeting is that it's definitely not a 'Psion-freaks-only' kind of thing, but a very interesting (and lighthearted) gathering where even the casual Psion user is always welcome. Personally, I do not know any other computer club of this kind. Of course, the short distances in little Switzerland are a big advantage for the club: people from the whole German speaking part of Switzerland can reach Zurich within about two hours."

For more information, contact:

PSILOG
Psion User Club of Switzerland
Fluelastrasse 47
CH-8047 Zurich
SWITZERLAND

Tel: +41 (0)1 4011212
Fax: +41 (0)1 4010815

E-mail: *100330.1764@compuserve.com*

PSILOGate +41 (0)1 7991156 / 57

http://www.village.ch/psilonet

Palmtop BINDERS

Due to the enormous response to our posting in the last issue of *Palmtop* a limited quantity of high quality binders are being produced for the magazine. Full details and pricing will appear in the next issue of *Palmtop*, together with a photograph.

If you wish to order your binders before the rush starts then you can contact us any time after 10th September to place your order. Binders will initially be limited to TWO per subscriber.

Palmtop Tee shirts

Following on from the enormous response for *Palmtop* binders, a number of readers have also expressed an interest in tee shirts. Please contact us if this is of interest to you, stating what colour(s) you would prefer and whether you would like the shirts to have a small embroidered *Palmtop* logo, or if you prefer a large and bold 'transfer'.

We will have a limited quantity of shirts produced in the most popular colour(s) and styles.

"On The Net"

The latest gossip from the Information Superhighway

Pete Sipple delves into the world of Psion 'net chatter to see what's new. This time we look at Psion in the year 2000, the pre-release rumours of the new machines, and SSD batteries.

Psion PLC have hit the headlines a lot in recent months. In June, the big story was their bid for Amstrad—allegedly to get their hands on *Dantel*, Amstrad's mobile communications division.

"What happened about Psion wanting Amstrad? Anyone know what is happening?"

(dolbyn@dircon.co.uk)

"Both Psion and Amstrad have issued separate statements announcing that they could not agree a price."

(jljones@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"Apparently their are rumours flying around the City that Sharp are interested in taking a stake or making a full bid for Psion. Anyone have any further information on this?"

(fmi@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"Haven't seen anything in the news on this side of The Pond regarding Sharp and Psion. It would certainly be a good merger if they could combine the best of both machines"

(72223.2140@compuserve.com)

"Oh Please—NO! Some Sharp pocket computers only appeared on the market for 6 months, then disappeared totally. Apparently this was the 'shotgun' method of marketing, but it left the poor users in the lurch."

(mharrisona@cix.compulink.co.uk)

In July, the US press announced that Microsoft are developing *Pegasus*, an Operating System based on Windows 95, to run on handheld computers. It now seems that Psion have decided to license their operating system too...

"I was very pleased to see Psion opening up its operating system to other developers. They have taken the lesson from Apple, I hope, that you can't keep an OS proprietary—even if it is superior—and expect to be able to charge a premium for it. So far as I know, Psion is the first PDA company to distribute its OS in this way, and I think it helps to ensure a long life and more prosperity for Psion (and of course us Psion owners!) The more readily available an operating system, the more applications will get written for it, and the more widespread its acceptance. Good luck to them!"

(adamr@eng.sun.com)

As always, the newsgroups are full of speculation about the new Psion machines (of course now a reality)...

"It's been reported in the UK press that Psion will be releasing an upgraded Psion 3a with infrared PC connection on September 5th for the UK. This is at the same time as the release of a new Psion model, the Sienna, which will be aimed at the lower end of the PDA market. This seems likely as I have noticed the price of the other Psion 3a computers has recently been reduced."

(100411.2311@compuserve.com)

"I've seen the box for the low end model—the Sienna, as a dealer had one he'd gotten from Psion. It's about 2/3rds the size of the 3a, has a smaller keyboard, the screen set to the left instead of centered, with a numeric keypad on the right. No expansion capability, the IR port you mentioned, and a backlit screen. To retail for between US$200 and US$300, depending on size. It's aimed squarely at the high-end organizer market."

(mwm@contessa.phone.net)

"... the paper states that next month there will be a cut-down 3a at £150 and a new version with infra red PC link. No built-in data communications machine until 1998(!)"

(maveya@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"1998??? What happened to '97? Ahwahahahaaa <Bawls like a baby>! Actually, come to think about it, I might actually have money for one by then!"

(101600.1776@compuserve.com)

It's nice when it works...

"Sorry to clutter the newsgroup with this, but I was just tickled pink the other day when I got my serial printer adaptor and was able to print from my 3a for the first time. It was so funny to see this big Apple Laserwriter being driven by the dinky Psion. Printing is normally such a hassle for the first few tries that I was delighted at how relatively simple this was, and the pages looked perfect! My girlfriend didn't quite have the same enthusiasm for the event that I did, for some reason (!), so thanks for letting me get out my good experience!"

(adamr@eng.sun.com)

"This is really cool, and definitely NOT clutter. Your girlfriend just doesn't understand. Wait until we really get the Internet going on the 3a... your girlfriend won't know what hit her!"

(colin_henderson@mindlink.bc.ca)

"There were 'oohs' and 'aahs' from my colleagues at work the other day when I demonstrated my wee Psion printing to a network printer via my PC. Little things..."

(marcus@avon-plc.demon.co.uk)

Users of RAM SSDs beware! There have been some recent horror stories about data loss when an SSD's internal battery fails. If an SSD is removed from the 3a then the batteries last only about three months. Do we get any warning before disaster?

"How do I know when the SSD battery is running out?"

(paulev@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"You don't! Take advice from someone who didn't—if in doubt, copy the contents of the RAM SSD and change its battery now. If you don't and the main batteries are removed for any reason, the SSD will be wiped."

(panflet@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"I've had my 512K Ram for about 3 years and <Psion-K> definitely gives current battery status on the top line. Mine says: Disk [A] "'FILES' (508K Ram, Battery Good)".

(dagriffiths@@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"Wait until we really get the Internet going on the 3a... your girlfriend won't know what hit her"

"If you have a newer RAM SSD, <Psion-K> will also tell you the status of the battery."

(psion_c@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"Mine doesn't. Want to swap???"

(rick@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"Do the main batteries sustain the RAM disks as long as they are plugged in?"

(paulev@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"The AA batteries do appear to power the RAM SSD. I've not had a battery in my RAM SSD all year, and the data stayed intact (until I had a mishap!)"

(hzk@cix.compulink.co.uk)

"People will abandon the 3a in droves if a new model does not appear soon - (like less than 50 years!)"

Software engineers and IT managers the world over are making loud noises about the 'Millennium Problem', which is set to wreak havoc with computers the world over. According to the Industry press, many millions of man hours will be spent re-writing software to cope with the year 2000. My moth-balled two-line XP Psion Organiser II can't cope with anything over 1999, but will the Series 3 die in the 21st Century?

"I hope not! Go into Agenda and you should be able to jump to a date well beyond 2000. Having said that, I've just tried jumping to 31st December 2049, the final date that Agenda allows. It seizes up every time, and I can only exit Agenda by killing it from the System screen—does that happen to anyone else? Not that it matters too much, I'm pretty sure the Psion Series 3a will be hopelessly outdated long before I am 84 years old!"

(101747.421@compuserve.com)

"It looks like Psion are going to have to get a move on, as we only have 54 YEARS left. People will abandon the 3a in droves if a new model does not appear soon - (like less than 50 years!)"

(rmunson@esoc.esa.de)

"There's a lot of hype at the moment about the year 2000 problem, but let's take a big tasty bite of reality pie and understand that PCs are not going to die or crash or kill people. The problem is simply that software and hardware that uses the DD/MM/YY format will interpret the year 2000 (00) as 1900, therefore making financial-related software miscalculate. For example you might use your VISA card on December 31st 1999, and when you got your statement, the computer would charge you 99 years of interest! It's not as drastic as is being made out..."

(100772.1226@compuserve.com)

Contact management software? Get your Act! together...

"Has anybody had experience with 'Act!' for the Psion, and can you recommend the program?"

(100131.1070@compuserve.com)

"I do use/like it, but the interaction with Agenda is pathetic. You're supposed to be able to export appointments into Agenda, but the second time you do this you end up with duplicates of the first ones! I also found Act! a bit inflexible, and with pretty limited report-writing and record selection facilities."

(dcurtis@hgmp.mrc.ac.uk)

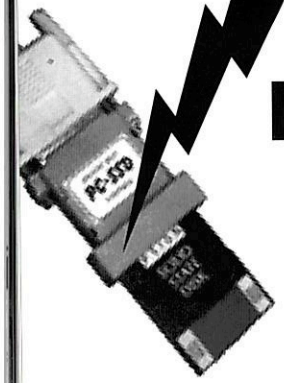
"It does the job, allowing up to 1500 contacts in the current version. It integrates with Act! for Windows very well, so if you are an Act! user then look no further."

(72662,3050@compuserve.com)

And finally—a word to anyone thinking of taking the plunge and going online. Before you make your first 'posting', take a few minutes to read through messages posted by others. There are certain informal rules for communicating with other users, and it pays to follow the 'Netiquette'. Some newcomers refuse to, as was proven recently on the CiX Psion conferences. In my three years of being a member of CiX I have never known one person to cause so much upset as one Venerable D (surname omitted), who, in the space of a matter of weeks, managed to upset or frustrate a whole host of respected names from the Psion community. The online groups and conferences are frequented by users, programmers and Psion support staff who are happy to offer help and advice for free in their own time. It is a valuable resource when treated with respect, for as well as being a helpline, online services are a forum for discussion, debate and information.

Psion related discussions take place in the comp.sys.psion.misc Usenet newsgroup, as well as the Psion conference on CiX, the Psion area on AOL, and the Palmtop A forum on CompuServe.

Pete Sipple.



Flash for the PC-SSD drive?

Martin Roberts talks about the option you've all been asking for (or so it seems)—flash support for the parallel port PC-SSD drive from the last issue

There has been quite a bit of interest in the PC-SSD interface described in the last issue, and a number of questions with one common thread: "when can I use it with flash SSDs?" It seems to be a case of "95 percent of Psion owners who expressed a preference said their Psions preferred flash!" It is a credit to the Psion community that many of these questions were accompanied by offers of help.

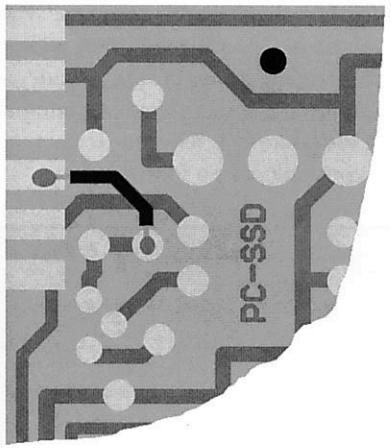
Personally I prefer to use a 128K RAM SSD for transferring files to and from my PC, treating it much like a floppy disk, but I agree that there is a need for a faster backup method for large flash SSDs. Those lucky enough to own a 4Mb flash SSD face a long wait when performing backups via *PsiWin*.

My own frustration with this process led me to write COPYFLSH.EXE, a simple DOS utility which will copy an entire flash SSD to a PC directory via the PC-SSD drive. This provides a much faster backup option: less than 4 minutes to backup a 4Mb flash on a fast PC, and gave me enough understanding of the flash filing system (thanks to the Psionic files on the Internet) to consider more ambitious projects. But first there were a few obstacles to overcome:

Hardware Changes

Although 5 volt flash devices are available, all the parts used in current SSDs require a 12V supply for write and erase operations. The Series 3a provides for this by supplying a constant 16V on the SSD connector whenever it is turned on. This is regulated to 12V and enabled to the flash devices by circuitry within the SSDs.

The PC-SSD can be made to emulate this function by connecting the external power supply to pin 4 of the SSD connector (after the input diode, to avoid any risk of damage due to incorrect supply polarity). The following diagram shows the position of this wire on the printed circuit board (in black):



All assembled PC-SSDs with the external power option supplied by *Palmtop* already have this wire in place.

The high voltage required for writing to flash means that the Psion external power supply is not suitable for this purpose - it only provides 9-10V. What is required is a supply of 15-18V with negative on the centre conductor; many unregulated 12V supplies fit the bill. I can vouch for the Tandy version, catalogue number 273-7034, which is rated at 12V 300mA on its highest setting, but actually supplies about 16V—it also has the correct 1.3mm connector. If you use a different supply then check the output voltage first as some of these unregulated units output double the stated voltage when lightly loaded.

There is a slight side effect to using a higher supply voltage, as under certain circumstances it can cause the 5V regulator within the PC-SSD to become warm. This occurs when the external supply is connected and the PC drives the printer port data lines low, as it does when entering *Windows*. This state will be cleared as soon as any access is made to the PC-SSD but if left in this state the current drawn by R2-R5, combined with the increased voltage will cause the regulator to heat up. This is not really a problem as the regulator incorporates protection against overheating, but it can be avoided altogether by increasing the value of R2-R5 to 1000 ohms.

This value still provides enough current for RAM SSDs and for reading flash SSDs when operating on internal power, while drastically reducing the power dissipation in the above situation. PC-SSDs with the external power option supplied by *Palmtop* with serial numbers of 13 and above have 1,000 ohm resistors installed. If anyone with an earlier serial number wishes to have the resistors changed then I will be happy to do it for them.

When connecting a power supply to any PC peripheral it is advisable to attach the device to your PC before turning the power supply on.

Software

With the hardware changes in place and the external power supply hooked up the PC-SSD is capable of writing to flash SSDs, but this isn't a great deal of use without any software support. In order to prove that everything works I have written two simple DOS programs: WRITFLSH.EXE which will copy a complete PC directory tree to a newly formatted flash SSD, effectively doing the reverse of COPYFLSH.EXE, and FFORMAT.EXE which will format type 1 and type 2 flash SSDs.

Formatting type 1 SSDs is the one situation where *PsiWin* has the speed advantage. This is because type 1 flash devices require each byte to be set to zero before erasure—*PsiWin* can let the 3a do all this work, but FFORMAT has to send each byte serially via the PC-SSD. Type 2 devices do not suffer from this problem because they can be erased with a single command. If you are in a hurry then I suggest to use your Psion to format type 1 SSDs.

Writing to flash is also a fairly slow process, but a full 4Mb SSD can still be restored in less than 20 minutes.

All three programs can be combined using a simple batch file to produce a flash compress utility: they all return the DOS error value 1 if a problem occurs and so this can be checked for using the DOS 'if errorlevel ...' batch command.

What next ?

The above programs provide a short-term fix for the slow backup problem and prove the feasibility of using the PC-SSD for flash. A better long term solution would be a device driver providing similar functionality for flash SSDs that SSDDRVR.SYS provides for RAM SSDs. With this in place you can use your favourite file management tools without them needing to be 'PC-SSD aware', so this is what I plan to attempt during all the spare time I have, now that my backups only take a few minutes!

PC-SSD drive availability

The programs mentioned in this article can be downloaded from Martin's Web pages at http://www2.wildnet.co.uk/~martinr/pcssd.html or http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/martinroberts. They are also available on 3.5" disk directly from *Palmtop*: see the last issue for details on how to obtain this and the PC-SSD drive itself. The PC-SSD is available from *Palmtop* as either a PCB only, or ready-assembled either with or without the external power connector option.

Taming the Cyclone

An in-depth appraisal of Purple Software's new floppy disk drive for the 3a.

by Lord John Wodehouse and Steve Clack

As discussed in the last issue of *Palmtop*, Purple Software have recently released a 3½ inch floppy disk drive for use with the Psion 3a. This is very different to the earlier *RangerDisk* and *Cristy Handydisk* drives, which did not allow direct access to the normal 3a file system.

A user perspective

The Cyclone drive arrived in a large box, much larger than the drive itself. The drive itself is 240mm x 100mm x 22mm. The case is black metal with the disk drive at one end. At the other end on the underside is the battery compartment, housing 5 AA batteries. The lid of the battery compartment is a metal plate held in place by two brass thumbscrews.

The only other item on the drive is the hardwired cable/connector, which plugs directly into the Psion. Unlike the *RangerDisk* and *Handydisk* a *3Link* cable is not required.

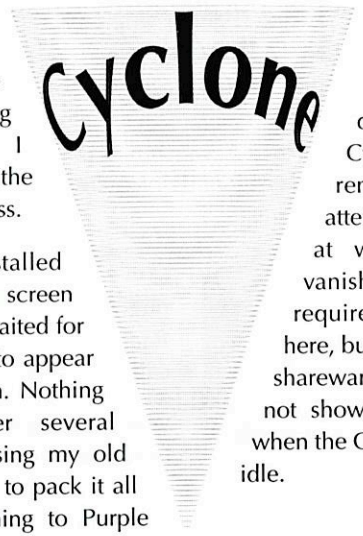
With the drive comes two manuals, both in English, French and German. The first is very slim and covers installation, and the second describes Purple Software's *File Manager* program, provided on an accompanying disk.

Unpacking

This was easy, but the installation manual contained no instructions on fitting the batteries. On the back of the box was a warning that the standard Psion mains adaptor was unsuitable, but this appeared nowhere else. I think it would have been preferable to have the option to buy a mains adaptor with the unit, and I am concerned by the absence of any further suggestions in the

manual. There is also no data on battery lifetime, or on what demands the Cyclone makes on the Psion's batteries—but more on that later.

Inserting the five AA batteries was a bit of a squeeze, but I fitted them successfully, reinstalled the cover and plugged the cable into the Psion. Again the manual failed me, giving no mention whether I should have switched the 3a off during this process.



At this stage, I installed *RunImg* on the system screen as directed, and then waited for the Cyclone (drive C:) to appear under the *Runimg* icon. Nothing happened, and after several attempts, (including using my old 512Kb 3a) I was about to pack it all up and return everything to Purple Software. I decided to check the batteries first though, and here things got harder. The batteries fit rather tightly and there is nothing underneath them to aid in their removal. Three come out with a little effort, but the final two were a real challenge.

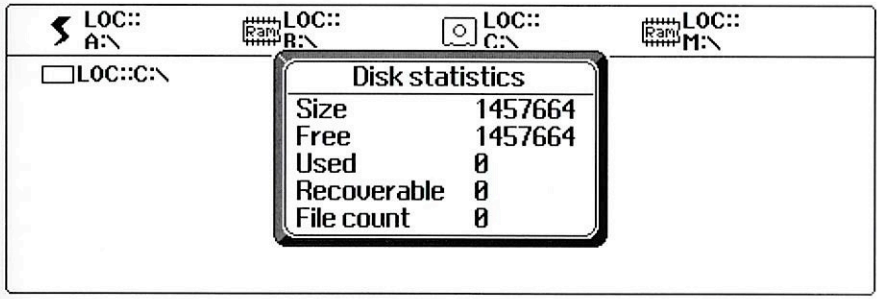
Checking the batteries showed that two were somewhat down on power, so with these replaced I tried again. This time all worked happily, and the Cyclone (C:) magically appeared on the 3a system screen. At this stage it was possible to simply select any programs and run them directly from the floppy disk. The small loader file CYCLONE.IMG is just under 7Kb in size, makes the floppy drive visible and rather cleverly allows other software/hardware to use the port as though it were just another SSD. When the Cyclone is plugged in, the software automatically recognises it and the usual squiggling 'remote link' icon appears whenever you access the 'LOC::C:' drive. Unplug the Cyclone and the link icon remains until you next attempt to access LOC::C:, at which point it neatly vanishes. The actual power requirements are not clear here, but investigations using the shareware *Gbattery* program do not show a major current drain when the Cyclone is plugged in and idle.

Using the Cyclone

After the initial frustrations I experienced above, operation was very simple. The normal Psion file manager sees the drive just like any other device on LOC::C:, and files can be read, written, copied and deleted just like an SSD or the internal disk. Installing applications is just like normal, and providing you don't attempt to eject a disk while the drive status LED is on or the link icon is animated, there seems little to cause trouble.

It is not possible to format, name or copy a floppy disk from the 'Disk' menu of the system screen, as the Psion only prompts for Internal, A or B.

The MACSYS macro *DskUse* (written by the author—a shameless plug) works very well. The Cyclone displays as a Floppy disk, formattable, dual density and compressible.



Just another disk—a 1.44Mb floppy disk appearing under Purple's *FIle Manager*

Purple Software's *File Manager* version 3.02F is provided on floppy disk, and it handles the Cyclone very well. It offers much better functionality than the built-in file selector, and floppy disks can be formatted as either high density (1.44Mb) or low density (720Kb). In addition it provides an option to remove the Cyclone software that was automatically loaded the first time the drive was connected to the 3a.

Other software

So far all software I have tried accesses the Cyclone without problems. Using JBTREE you cannot get the normal local drive selection box to handle the C drive, but by pressing the <Esc> key a dialogue box appears, allowing the selection of 'LOC::C:'.

Clashes with other software

If you have been using the Cyclone and then switch to another application needing the remote link, you have to force the Psion to realise that the Cyclone has been removed. This is done by attempting to access the 'C' drive. If the link icon is still present when the remote link is needed, then the Psion still thinks the Cyclone is using the communications port. Turning the Psion off and on does not change this, but once the C: drive is accessed the link icon goes out and the *3Link* or *3Fax* can be used as normal.

Speed and copying/backup

For simple file copying to and fro the Cyclone is quite fast. I tried to copy, reformat and copy back to a 2Mb Flash

SSD with Steve Litchfield's *Mapper3a* program and files on it, using the Cyclone to store the temporary copies. The Flash SSD contained 453 files occupying 1,139Kb of space. One of the *Mapper* directories contained more than 200 files alone.

The very large number of small files in one of the *Mapper* directories resulted in the backup or copy starting quickly, but after a few minutes the copy rate slowed to a crawl, with lots of floppy disk accesses and head movement. The reason seems to be the constant need to refer to the directory to add each new file. Once a number of files exist in the directory, reading it takes more than one access. Floppy access speeds slow anyway as you work inward, so the two things combine to result in more and more head movement and slower and slower write speeds. So far I have yet to complete the job.

Feelings and comments

In general the Cyclone seems well designed to work with the Psion. My main reservations are the lack of information about battery installation, lifetime and the way the batteries are installed, removed and their cover secured. This is not crucial, but given the fact that I am generally at home with devices like this, I had initial problems. Some other users might have given up before finding the problem, and the lack of adequate warning about a suitable mains adaptor could lead to serious problems or damage to the unit.

With no means of knowing the battery state I would have liked to see a tiny on/off switch to ensure that the batteries are not being drained when the Cyclone is unplugged. It may not be required, but the manual gives no information on this.

From a design perspective I am not convinced that a long thin box is the best. Maybe the electronics cannot be folded up in such a way as to halve the length and double the depth, but it is hardly a pocketable device—though it does fit into a briefcase easily.

General operation and speed seem fair. Others will no doubt produce figures and benchmarks. Reliability will take time to assess.

It is a pity that high density floppy disks only hold 1.4 megabytes of data. The Psion backup utility does not allow a 2 or 4Mb Flash SSD to be backed up to multiple floppy disks, so until someone writes software to do that you will have do this manually.

Lord Wodehouse

A second opinion - by Steve Clack

Out of the box I was at first struck by the Cyclone's size. The thing hadn't appeared nearly so long in the press photographs, and I certainly hadn't expected it to be so heavy. It weighs around 850g with a full set of five AA batteries, which is a significant amount to tote around in a briefcase or bag while on your travels. My expectations may be too high, but I can't help thinking that current technology could have squeezed the whole thing into a box no more than half the 240mm length of the Cyclone. I owned a 720K floppy drive for the Tandy Model 100 portable computer around 10 years ago, and it was certainly no larger in overall size and bulk than the modern day Cyclone. I have to say that this left me disappointed with the hardware technology, especially when I saw that the battery compartment cover is a rectangle of aluminium sheet held in place by a pair of brass thumbscrews. I can't say that this approach is bad, it's just not the kind of thing one expects on modern mass-produced consumer electronics. Still, the Cyclone drive is clearly not 'mass' produced in the same kind of quantities as the average TV set or cassette recorder, so I'll forgive the unfamiliar construction approach. The whole thing generally has a very solid feel, and the all-metal casing (apart from the floppy drive fascia) gives the unit a really hefty and durable appearance.

Room for improvement

I can't help feeling that the excellent concept of this device has been let down a little by this overall bulk, and by a lack of attention to detail in both the packaging and documentation. It would have been good to see at least a simple vinyl case supplied with the unit, as even a small amount of time left rattling around in a dusty briefcase may be enough to fill the rather sensitive innards with potentially damaging detritus, and there is also a risk of straining and damaging the cable where it is hard-wired into the back of the drive. I would personally have preferred to be able to unplug the lead from the back when not in use.

The lack of a mains adaptor is also an irritation, especially as the only mention of the entire subject is the bit on the back of the outer packaging that says *"Power adaptor specification 6v at 300mA continuous 500mA peak, 1.3mm jack socket, tip negative. (standard Psion Series 3a power adaptor is not suitable)."*

Documentation for the *File Manager* software is quite adequate (being a mature product), but the three pages or so of text for the hardware are simply not enough. Purple Software promise that they are aware of this problem, and apparently intend to improve the documentation on the disk drive and AC adaptor in the near future. Help is at hand with cases too, as at least one major manufacturer is in the process of producing a custom case for the Cyclone, which will be reviewed in *Palmtop* as soon as it becomes available.

Built to a price

Negative observations apart, the Cyclone is obviously built to a price just like any other piece of hardware, and the addition of the case, adaptor and removable cable would inevitably have pushed this up significantly. The use of a smaller drive and a lighter, plastic casing would also have added to the cost, perhaps taking it over the £200 mark. There is obviously a maximum price the market will stand, and I believe that Purple Software were well advised to keep it below £200 as they have done.

In terms of functionality I found it hard to fault the Cyclone. Running programs directly from the Cyclone is obviously a rather slow process, as floppy disks access data much more slowly than almost-instantaneous SSDs, but it certainly works without problems—provided that the software author has not hard-coded the software to work only from drive A, B or M.

Faster backups?

If you plan to buy a Cyclone for faster backups of your 3a then you're unlikely to be disappointed. I transferred more than a megabyte of data from the internal drive of my 2Mb 3a in under 5 minutes, and formatting a 1.44Mb disk took just one minute. Data transfer rates seem to average approximately four times that of PsiWin, so you'll find it pretty tedious to go back to PC backups once you get used to a Cyclone. I have some concerns about large directories as noted by Lord Wodehouse, but experienced no problems with my (perhaps) more 'typical' directory structure.

The shareware solution

If you have no desktop computer but want a means of accessing shareware and commercial software distributed on floppy disk then the Cyclone is ideal.

Running the programs directly off the Cyclone before you load them onto your 3a can be useful (make sure that you put all the files into appropriate directories on the disk first). Unzipping of shareware is still necessary when it is distributed in compressed form, but this is quite straightforward with a little bit of disk juggling where appropriate. The keen PC-less user will soon get the hang of transferring files between floppies to make space for the unzipped versions of each file, then loading the unzipped files into the right directories. This kind of operation will tend to be quite disk-intensive, so a mains adaptor is an important accessory for the shareware buff. Purple claim that the five AA batteries will last for approximately 10-15 hours of use, but beware that the drive is active and draining power as soon as it is plugged into the 3a, so don't forget to unplug it when you have finished transferring files.

Limited portability

For the user wanting a truly 'portable' device then the Cyclone will undoubtedly come as a disappointment. I spent many years travelling extensively around the world with a pile of computer equipment, and I know how inconvenient it is to lug around something of the size and weight of the Cyclone, particularly now we are all so used to the fantastic miniaturisation of the 3a itself. Still, the need for a portable backup device and effectively unlimited data storage are of paramount importance to some, and those using the 3a as an alternative to dragging a laptop computer around the globe will still think themselves lucky.

Steve Clack

InfoBOX

The Cyclone drive is available directly from Purple Software, or from major Psion dealers at £169.95 including VAT. See page 99 for more details.

Cyclone and the 3c / Siena

The connector on the Cyclone drive is designed for the 3a and *WorkAbout* machines only. The new connector and RS232 output of the 3c and Siena will require some major re-work on the Cyclone, not just a simple cable adaptor. We hope to be able to announce Purple Software's plans for this in the next issue of *Palmtop*.

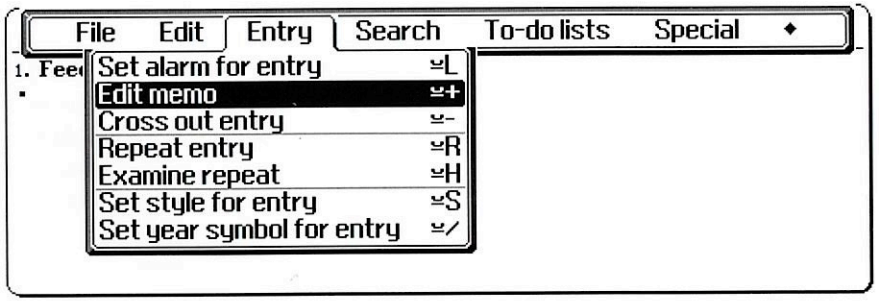
Hints & Tips

More ideas to help use your Psion more efficiently. Brenda Hazel wins a free leather case for her suggestions on copying memo information across AGENDA entries...

Manipulating memos...

I use AGENDA's 'To-Dos' as a filing system, and store lots of miscellaneous information in the memos attached to each to-do item. If you do this you may have discovered that you cannot copy the contents of one memo to another using <Psion-C> and <Psion-I>: anything you have copied with <Psion-C> is lost when you Press <Psion-X> to exit the memo you are copying from. This is particularly annoying if you want to split a memo into two, often necessary if you reach the maximum number of characters allowed in a memo (just over 3,000) and cannot add to it or save it until you have deleted something.

One way around this problem is to use the 'Bring' facility to temporarily place a portion of the original memo in a WORD file before 'Bring'ing it back into a second memo. Start off by highlighting the portion of text you wish to copy in your first memo—do not on any account press the <Delete> key or <Psion-X> to exit the memo at this stage. Instead, press the WORD button and open a new file. Press <Psion-B> and your copied slice of memo will be read into the WORD file and remain highlighted. Keep that highlighted (so don't press any keys), then hit the AGENDA button to go straight back to your first memo. The piece of memo you originally copied will still be highlighted, and you can now use the <Delete> key to get rid of it and do any further editing required before pressing <Psion-X> to save and exit the memo.



Edit that memo—one of AGENDA's (slightly) hidden features

Now create a new to-do in the usual way. Then press <Psion-+> to edit its memo. Press <Psion-B> and the highlighted text from the WORD file will be read into the memo for you to edit and save as required. You can now go back to your WORD file and press <Psion-Shift-X> to exit it without saving.

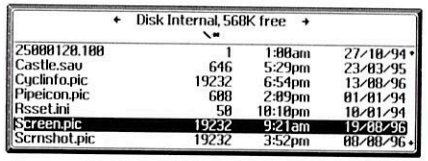
An alternative way to split the contents of a memo before you run into the maximum character situation is to place your cursor on the memo's associated to-do entry, then press <Psion-C> to copy the whole to-do with its memo. Then press <Psion-I> to insert the to-do and memo at the cursor position, thus creating a duplicate to-do and memo entry. You can then edit both to-dos and their memos as desired.

Of course, one way of avoiding this whole issue is to do what the manual tells you to do in the first place—if you want to create long lists etc., don't do it in AGENDA but in WORD itself!

Brenda Hazel
Bicester, Oxfordshire

Saving Alarms

If ever you have to perform a soft or hard reset on your Psion, apart from the annoyance of having to re-setup your system screen and preferences, you will also find that any alarms previously set in the TIME application will have disappeared. This can be annoying if you have a lot of alarms and cannot easily remember them all. One way to make a quick backup of all the alarms is to save a snapshot of the TIME screen itself with <PSION><SHIFT><CONTROL><S>. This will create a file *screen.pic* in the top level directory of your M: drive, which can be renamed to something like *alarms.pic*, and referenced whenever you have to reset your computer.



Your screen-dump, ready and waiting

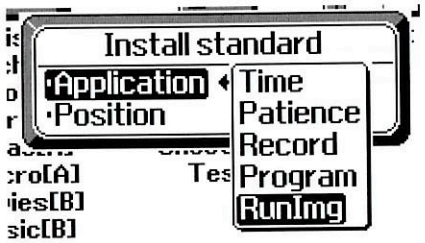
Note that in order to view these '.PIC' files you will need to get a 'PIC viewer' or graphics program for your Psion, or use PsiWin to convert the PIC files directly to Windows BMP format, or *GraphicConverter* on an Apple Macintosh to convert to almost any common graphic format.

Finally, don't confuse these PIC files with the ones that appear in the Series 3/3a spreadsheet. They are a Lotus 1-2-3 compatible type of graph, and are not interchangeable.

Shifting TIME

The in-built restriction of 50 icons on the system screen can be a real annoyance to those who like to keep lots of software on their machine. You can save at least one icon by removing TIME from the system screen. There is no disadvantage in doing this as the built-in clock cannot be inadvertently shut down, and can always be accessed just by hitting the TIME button on the touch-pad.

If you also leave other applications running in the background you can remove their icons from the system screen too, and while they are running they will appear under the RUNIMG icon, which you can install from the 'Install Standard' menu option from the system screen.

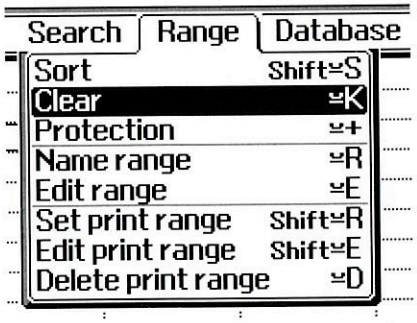


Installing RunImg

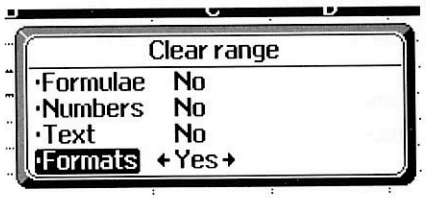
If you still can't squeeze all of your applications into the 50 limit, then your best option is to obtain either JBLAUNCH or XFILE. These freeware/shareware programs will allow you to extend your icon count well beyond the normal limit, and both work very well. See issue 6 of *Palmtop* for reviews of these two products.

Saving spreadsheet memory

A quick tip for reducing memory usage in your spreadsheets is to remove any cells which contain formatting instructions only, i.e. those without any text or numbers inside. To do this simply select a range, then choose 'Clear' from the 'Range' menu. Then set it to clear only the 'Formats', (all else to no) and press <Enter>. Also, if you have just copied a large amount of data into the clipboard, it will stay there even after you paste it back again. To remove it and regain its memory, just copy an empty cell into the clipboard.



Select the 'clear' option...



...Then set to clear 'formats' only

We need your tips!

We are always on the lookout for interesting and original tips from readers, so if you have some useful techniques you would like to share with other Psion users then please send them in to us.

All published tips will earn a free issue added to your subscription, and the best tip in each issue will win the author a six month subscription extension or a special prize as announced in each issue.

Resubscribing

Some readers have contacted us to ask when their resubscription is due. Don't worry—everyone will automatically receive a reminder with their last issue, so there is no danger that you will miss anything.

You do *not* need to resubscribe if you receive a yellow subscription form—this is just something you can pass onto other interested parties. You only need to resubscribe if you receive a personalised letter with your name, address and subscription number on it.

WANTED!

If anyone out there has a Psion MC400 laptop computer for sale then please contact:

Poppy Holden

tel: +44 (0)181 9861329

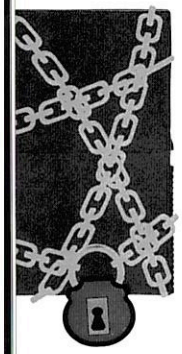
e-mail: 100330.2716@compuserve.com

ALSO

Any MC400 software and hardware wanted, especially MC400 SDK (OPL or C) or MC400 Technical Manual.

Contact: Jason Hall

tel/fax: +44 (0)1425 472287



A Matter of Life & Death

Stephen Murgan muses over that most mundane but vital of all computing tasks—backups!

For the typical *Palmtop* reader, your Psion is an integral part of your lifestyle. It takes care of remembering all your important stuff, just so that *you* can forget about it. Names, telephone numbers, birthdays, anniversaries, documents, alarms—all within easy reach, wrapped up in a neat and pocket-sized package. It is a trusty little sidekick that can help you maximise your potential and stay on track.

It is designed to take a *modest* amount of abuse. It has fallen out of pockets, handbags and moving vehicles, dropped off desks and bedside tables, and generally been bashed around a lot. It is designed to take a good bit of punishment, and that is one of the reasons that you rely on the wee beastie so much.

However, the Psion is not indestructible, and will not last forever. Murphy's law tolerates no exception, and even that tough grey plastic case is not much protection against a misguided steam-roller or an errant bolt of lightning.

Even without mishandling, there are some weak points in the design: the dreaded battery cable problem, while now largely behind us, still occasionally bites users in the rear, while the strength of the hinges—or lack thereof—remains an all-too-common problem.

It is a constant source of amazement to me that some people expect their hardware to last forever. In an industry where memory and processor capacity doubles every eighteen months and user expectations seem to rise exponentially, any hardware will effectively be obsolete within three years or so. For this reason, you can expect an operational life of two to three years from your Psion. In other words, when you buy one, you should do so under the assumption that it will be dead by its third birthday. Even if it survives that long, the chances are that its resale value will be negligible when you want to trade up. Computer hardware is a tool—never an investment.

Disregarding the spectre of physical damage, disaster can still strike in the form of data loss. Removal of both sets of batteries is a one-way ticket to data oblivion, and loss or theft is always a worry. To many a Psion user the hardware is less important than the data that has been painstakingly entered and updated over months or even years.

So, what would you do if your little pal suddenly followed all the calculators to silicon heaven, or simply went absent without leave? One of the unkindest things about Murphy's law is that it strikes when it is least expected—and when you are least prepared for the assault.

Let's be blunt here, if your data is important (and if it isn't you probably would not be reading this) you ***must*** keep backups. That is not an option. If you don't have a backup, you should be asking yourself one question: "Do I feel lucky today?"

While it is my personal opinion that the *3Link* connection hardware is somewhat overpriced, if you have access to a suitable desktop computer it is an absolute must. The alternative—a cartridge used for data backup—is even more expensive, and therefore wasted on a function as mundane as archival backups. You need to set up some sort of system that makes connecting and running backups as painless as possible. Most of us have already done this.

Where many of us fall short is in not having a way to access our data without the Psion. Most of the files on your machine are stored in a proprietary format, mostly for reasons of space. While you might be able to view some of them with a hex editor, this is no fun. Unless you are in the habit of exporting everything in portable formats you may have perfect backups, but no way of reading them on your other computer.

There is another solution that might be worthy of investigation. There is a 3a 'Emulator' which runs under DOS on a minimum of a 386 PC with at least 4Mb RAM and VGA graphics *(and also under SoftWindows 3 on a Macintosh - Ed.)* It requires total ownership of your PC (no, it won't work under Windows, OS/2 or any other multitasking system: Win95 has to be run in DOS mode, which does not really count as multitasking). It's not perfect—it was written by Psion for internal use and is unsupported—but it is free, and allows you to have a 'virtual' 3a running inside your PC with access to your real (backup) data. *(See Pete Sipple's Emulator article in issue 3 for more details - Ed.)*

While not much use when compared to having a Psion in your pocket, This is an excellent fallback position if your machine has to be sent away for repairs, or you want to wait a few days to see if an absent machine will find its way home. It is also useful as a way of browsing backups and archived files without having to move them up and down the *3Link*. You can find the 3a emulator on CompuServe, amongst other places, in Library 18 of the Palmtop forum under the name S3AEMU.ZIP (882K). A Series 3 version is also available, as S3EMUL.ZIP (321K).

While writing this article, I came across a new package called PsioMan, available as shareware on CompuServe, and also available as a commercial package. This is a Windows program that facilitates S3a-to-PC communication and allows you to view your deskbound backups. While it was very nice, I found it lacking in three key features that I really needed: the ability to reopen the applications that were closed before a backup (this function is fulfilled admirably by JBSTOPGO, the freeware package by John Boyce), the ability to synchronise independently-updated database and agenda files on PC and 3a, and support for drag-and-drop file copying (also available in PsiWin). Unlike the emulator, there is no support for accessing backups of your A and B drives—perhaps they should put this on their wish-list for the next version.

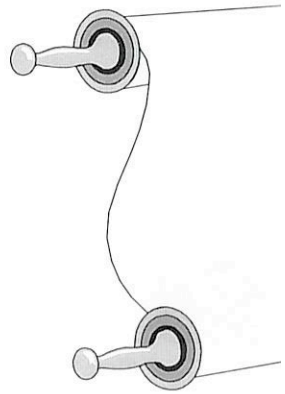
Given that connection software is already bundled with the *3Link* cable, and that backups can be just as easily viewed with the free 3a emulator, it is difficult to justify PsioMan's registration price tag (DM100, £45, $75). Of course it is easy to use, and if convenience is important to you then it might be worth having, but don't take my word for it, why not download it and try it out? The filename is PM12C_C.ZIP (459K). Note that this file requires VBRUN300.DLL.

Of course, if you backup your data to a PC hard drive there is always the possibility of your hard disk curling its proverbial toes, but that is a subject better left to the experts (hah!) in the relevant PC magazines.

In closing, a prime reason why people do not make the maximum use of their palmtops is due to fear of data loss. Many have used lesser electronic organisers in the past, and have lost all their data when the battery ran out. Some have used the Psion Organiser II, with it's capacitor that sometimes held data across a battery swap, and sometimes didn't. Psion have learned from this, and have given us a system where data loss is the rare exception rather than the rule. But like driving, the best way to avoid an accident is to stay defensive and avoid trusting to luck.

"Let's be careful out there..."

The Psion Reference



If you would like to be included in this ever-expanding directory then please send details directly to *Palmtop* for free inclusion.

New or updated items are marked with a star

Official World Wide Web Sites

	Psion UK plc	http://www.psion.com/ The Psion plc (UK) site
	Psion Inc.	http://www.psioninc.com/ Psion Inc (USA) - Press releases, price lists and retailers.
★	**Psion Software plc**	http://www.software.psion.com/ Division of Psion plc responsible for licensing the operating system
	Psion GmbH	http://emporium.turnpike.net/P/psion-gmbh/ Psion GmbH (Germany)
	Acorn Homepage	http://www.acorn.co.uk/acorn/ Acorn Pocketbook users can access information and press releases.

Psion resources on the WWW

	3-Lib Homepage	http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/slitchfield/ Shareware, features, news, software reviews and interviews
★	**Mark Gould's Psion Links**	http://www.bris.ac.uk/~lwmdcg/Psion/ Links to just about any other Psion related site in the world

Palmtop's own Homepage http://members.aol.com/palmtop/
Information on all aspects of *Palmtop* Magazine

Psion Online OPL Manual http://www.primate.wisc.edu/people/dubois/psion/oplman/
Search or browse the online OPL Programming Manual

Psion Programmers http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/8130/prgers.htm
List of software authors, programs, email and web addresses.

The Psionics File http://www.gold.net/users/cdwf/psion/psionics/
File structure information on AGN, DBF, SPR formats, etc.

Psion retailers

Clove Technology (UK) tel: +44 (0)1202 302796
http://intertrader.com/computers/clove/

New World Technologies (USA) tel: +1 212 941 4633
http://www.nwt.com

Widget Software Ltd (UK) tel: +44 (0)1438 815444
http://www.widget.co.uk/

Software Authors

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Mark Avey - *HangMan, CallCalc, I Ching, CrosWord*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/groucho/

John Boyce - *JBData, JBTree, JBFind, JBLaunch, JBSort, JBBackup, JBDial*
http://www.compulink.co.uk/~jbsoft/

Andy Clarkson - *OPP, Plan*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/andyc

David Clifton - *SpyderX, Spyder9, SpyderT*
http://www.earthnet.net/~eieio/

Nick Dawkins - *Dungeon*
http://www.pavilion.co.uk/users/ndawkins/

Jon Duff - *Icondraw, Convert2*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jon_duff/

Mark Esposito, Pelican Software - *Notepad, Banker, Taskman, BattCheck*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/pelican/

Nils Faerber - *FreeVT Terminal emulator*
http://vespa.unix-ag.uni-siegen.de/~nils/freevt.html

Steve Godfrey - *WorldTime, Fonteditor*
http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~steveg/

David Joyce - *MemoVoc, TimeVoc*
http://www.compulink.co.uk/~djoyce/

Thomas Lansing - *PsioMan*
http://www.innomate.de/lansys/psioman/

Steve Litchfield - *Mapper, Mapper London, Mapper Ireland, Slide, Fairway, LifeGuide*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/slitchfield/

Hugh Matthew - *Shoplist*
http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Park/3275/

Matt Millar - *Backgammon*
http://www.compulink.co.uk/~windmill/

Mobile Pages - *Database specialists for corporate and personal use*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/mobile_pages

Roger Muggleton - *Pocket Packet*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/g0hzk

Daniel Pfund - *DPBank, DPSwitch, Splitz*
http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/8130/

Alan Richey - *S3Abank, S3Adraw, S3ACollect*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/alanrichey/

Martin Roberts - *PC RAM SSD drive*
http://www2.wildnet.co.uk/~martinr/pcssd.html

Richard Schmidt - *Calc3a, Worklog, Trips3a*
http://www.worldonline.nl/~rschmidt/

Pete Sipple - *BankPlus, Bank, KallCost*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/psipple

Matt Thomas - *League Lexicon, Lottery Lexicon, Quiz Lexicon*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/matt_thomas/

Symantec - *Act!*
http://www.symantec.com/compinfo/news/products/actpispr.html

Simon Webb - *Tube*
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/swebb/

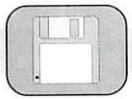
John Whiting - *Agenda Link*
http://dialspace.dial.pipex.com/john.whiting/

Discussion Groups

UseNet Groups

comp.sys.psion.announce	*comp.sys.psion.apps*	*comp.sys.psion.marketplace*
comp.sys.psion.misc	*comp.sys.psion.programmer*	*comp.sys.psion.reviews*

CompuServe Psion discussion	Palmtop A
CiX Psion conference	Psion
Palmtop Magazine discussion	palmtop_mag conference
AOL - Psion Noticeboard	Psion/General noticeboard - Keyword: Psion



Psion Software

Imperial Archive FTP Site	ftp://src.doc.ic.ac.uk/packages/psion/icdoc/
Frontiernet FTP Site	ftp://ftp.frontiernet.net/pub/psion
New World Technology FTP Site	ftp://ftp.nwt.com/FTP/S3a/
Cityscape Psion Archive	ftp://cityscape.co.uk/pub/psion/
Usenet Binary Group	comp.binaries.psion
CompuServe Psion files area	*Palmtop A* forum
CiX Psion files area	*/files* topic of the Psion conference

Psion FAQ

The Frequently Asked Questions document contains useful information, facts, names, addresses and numbers:

Posted monthly to the *comp.sys.psion.announce* newsgroup.

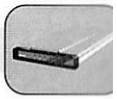
Available for FTP download from *news.answers* FTP sites, including rtfm.mit.edu/pub/usenet/news.answers/psion-faq/

An online version can be accessed from:
http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/8130/faq.htm

Available by e-mail. Send an e-mail message to mail-server@rtfm.mit.edu with a message containing the lines "send usenet/news.answers/psion-faq/*" to receive all parts or send a message containing "help" and "index" for more information.

Other WWW Sites

Digital Vision Magazine (Chinese)	http://www.hkstar.com/~micro/
Psion Club Series 3 (France)	http://alex.union-fin.fr/usr/dcabuzel/psion/clubpsion.html
WAVE Publishing (Germany)	http://www.wave.cube.net/
The Series 4 wishlist	http://www.computer-ease.com/ce/psion/index.html
PSILOnet (Swiss User Group)	http://www.village.ch/psilonet/



Bulletin Boards

Crystal Tower (UK)	+44 (0)817 598 244
Datalink BBS (UK)	+44 (0)1202 660 838 (currently offline for a while)
User Group (UK)	+44 (0)1752 894422
Lonely Times (Germany)	+49 911 393 9034
User Group (The Netherlands)	+31 515 574188
Belgian Psion BBS	+32 3 2262079

An introduction to SHAREWARE

In the pages of *Palmtop* you'll read a lot about Shareware. Shareware is a gold-mine of useful applications with something for everyone. The quality is amazing—there's so much to choose from, and it's cheap!

What is shareware?

Written by professional programmers and enthusiasts, shareware is normally supplied for use on a thirty day trial basis. If you like the software then you are expected to send a payment to the author. The programs themselves contain information on use and cost.

Where do I get it?

- Via a modem. Downloaded to your 3a or your desktop computer from a online service such as CompuServe, AOL or CiX (in the UK), from an Internet Service Provider, or from a bulletin board.
- From the *3-Lib* shareware library. Software is supplied on 3.5" PC floppy disc. See the advertisement section for details.
- From a PC-formatted CD-ROM. Available from leading Psion dealers, these discs contain stacks of useful programs and utilities.

How do I use it?

The software will need to be copied onto your Psion. Shareware will normally need un-compressing before you can use it. Programs to do this (such as PKZIP, S3UNZIP, Winzip and Zipit), are freely available from your shareware supplier. Unless you're getting your shareware on SSD, you'll also need some external hardware, such as:

- Serial Lead (3Link). Connect your 3a to a desktop machine (PC, Mac) or a modem.
- Cyclone drive. Connect a 3.5" floppy disc drive to your 3A.
- SSD RAM drive. Copy programs to a RAM SSD via your PC's printer port.

Further reading:

Shareware—What, Where & How
Page 43 of Issue 6

Connecting your Series 3 - P41, Issue 5

Going on-line - P40, Issue 1

SSD Drive - P41, Issue 7

CD-ROM - P20, Issue 7 , P19, Issue 4

Cyclone disk drive - P14, Issue 7

Pete Sipple

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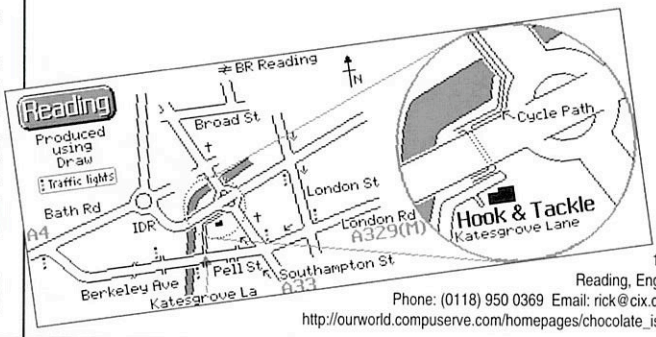
Chocolate Island Software

DRAW



For more info, please contact:
Rick Andrews
16 Alpine Street
Reading, England RG1 2QA
Phone: (0118) 950 0369 Email: rick@cix.compulink.co.uk
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/chocolate_island_software/

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or 100526.3715@compuserve.com

Features and Benefits

- Durable housing ideal for mobile use.
- Uses standard, low-cost 720K and 1.44Mb PC floppy diskettes.
- Transfer diskettes between your Cyclone drive and your PC.
- Appears simply as drive C to all your Psion applications.
- Works with all software that adheres to Psion standards.
- Back-up your files speedily and at a fraction of the cost compared with Flash SSDs.
- Save money by buying your Psion applications on floppy diskette.
- Includes the renowned File Manager software.
- Compatible with the Psion Work*About*.
- Powered by 5 AA cells or mains adapter (not supplied).
- Dimensions: 240mm long, 105mm wide, 30mm high.
- Price £169.95 inc. VAT plus p&p.

Memovoc-2

Speech Input to the Psion 3a

"One of the top ten 'genuinely useful' shareware apps"
as rated by New World Technologies Web site

"...adds considerably to the usefulness of the Psion"
Irish Times

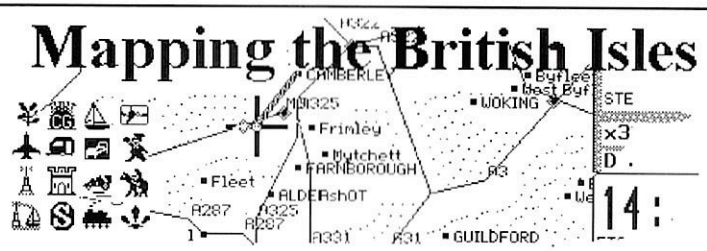
"Thanks for producing a truly useful piece of software"
Mr David Barlow

Memovoc-2 lets you record and play back voice memos in a simple and convenient way. Put the sound capabilities of your Psion to good use!

Features: Cyclic Play - Alarm Link - Info Module - Voice Activated Recording, Time Remaining and much more

Contact: David Joyce, 2 Seabury Parade, Malahide, Co. Dublin, Ireland.
Telephone: 00-353-1-8450694, Email: djoyce@cix.compulink.co.uk

Mapping the British Isles



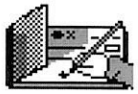
Towns, roads, overlays, navigation, information, GPS moving map, town plans, code lookups, distance logging/export !

Mapper-3a/GB and Mapper-3a/Ireland are fully working shareware for the Psion 3a and Acorn Pocketbook II computers.
Download from http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/slitchfield or send self-addressed envelope, formatted floppy disk and £1.50 in loose stamps to:
Steve Litchfield, 22 Grays Crescent, Woodley, Reading, RG5 3EN

Alan Richey's Shareware Software

"All the software you need to run your life !!"

S3ABANK Personal Accounts Suite — Registration Fee £20 (30US$)



The most comprehensive Shareware financial package presently available for the Psion S3A and, with almost 1000 registered users, it is currently the 3rd most registered Shareware program for the Psion. As well as the usual financial functions, including full Quicken compatibility, this program also includes (for free) the following five standalone programs as fully-integrated optional modules.

S3AEXP	Expense Account/Company Car Monitor	£10 (15US$)
S3AFUEL	Fuel Consumption Monitor	£7 (10US$)
S3AHOME	Home Inventory Monitor	£7 (10US$)
S3AINV	Investment Performance Monitor	£7 (10US$)
S3APLAN	Financial Budget Calendar	£7 (10US$)
S3ATASK	Extended ToDo Manager	£10 (15US$)
S3ADRAW	Drawing/Picture/Icon Viewer/Editor	£10 (15US$)
S3ACOLL	Collection Manager (Books, CDs, stamps etc)	£7 (10US$)

F A Richey
6001 Natick Court
Burke VA 22015
USA

E-Mail: alanrichey@msn.com
All the programs are available at:
WWW : http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/alanrichey
or at : ftp://ftp.nwt.com
or at CompuServe, America-On-Line, CIX, Microsoft Network
or by sending a 3.5" disc and stamped addressed envelope to one of the two addresses quoted.

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Isle of Mull
Calgary
Argyle, PA75 6QT
SCOTLAND

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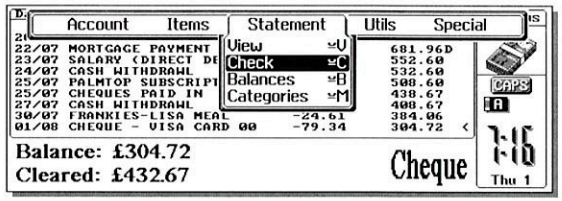
- Pays standing orders automatically
- Keep a check on bank and credit card accounts.



BankPlus is the simple way to keep your bank and credit card statements in order and make sure your accounts stay in the black. ***BankPlus*** costs just £8, or £9 (incl. p&p) on 3.5" disk. Send a cheque or your credit card details to: Pete Sipple, 51 Eastwood Boulevard, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex SS0 0BY

The shareware version is freely available from usual sources.
Email *psipple@cix.compulink.co.uk* for details, or download the latest version from *http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/psipple/bankplus.htm*

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http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/mobile_pages

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128k	2Mb	£459
128k	4Mb	£738
512k	2Mb	£381
512k	4Mb	£696
1Mb	2Mb	£335
1Mb	4Mb	£645
2Mb	4Mb	£362

Prices include VAT & UK postage

FLASH UPGRADES		
128k	256k	£29
128k	512k	£72
128k	1Mb	£87
128k	2Mb	£168
128k	4Mb	£283
128k	8Mb	£504
256k	512k	£56
256k	1Mb	£78
256k	2Mb	£164
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512k	2Mb	£159
512k	4Mb	£261
512k	8Mb	£483
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Shareware version available free from http://www.compulink.co.uk/~windmill/ e-mail millar@cix.compulink.co.uk

"...one of the best games that I have seen for the Psion" - *Palmtop magazine*

"Superb shareware implementation of the game" - *Psion Support Bulletin*

Next Issue...

Planned for issue 9:

- More in-depth discussion of the new 3c and Siena machines.
- The Global Positioning Systems and data exchange articles that we couldn't fit into this issue...
- A look at conversion software for the Psion—litres to gallons and all that stuff.
- We review all of the 'JB' software series by John Boyce, and talk to the man himself...
- Connecting your Psion to an Amiga computer, the first in a new series on non-PC connectivity.
- Computers you can wear. Leigh Edwards examines the current state of the technology.
- Plus all the usual features in a 'biggest ever' 108 page whopper!